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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LAS VEGAS CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

## LAS VEGAS

The **100** people,  
events, ideas and  
buildings that  
shaped our city



**A WYNN WIN** Critic Alan Hess on the Strip's trendsetter

**DOES IT TAKE A VILLAGE?** Las Vegas experiments with New Urbanism

**SEVEN GREAT DESIGNS** We unveil the latest award-winners



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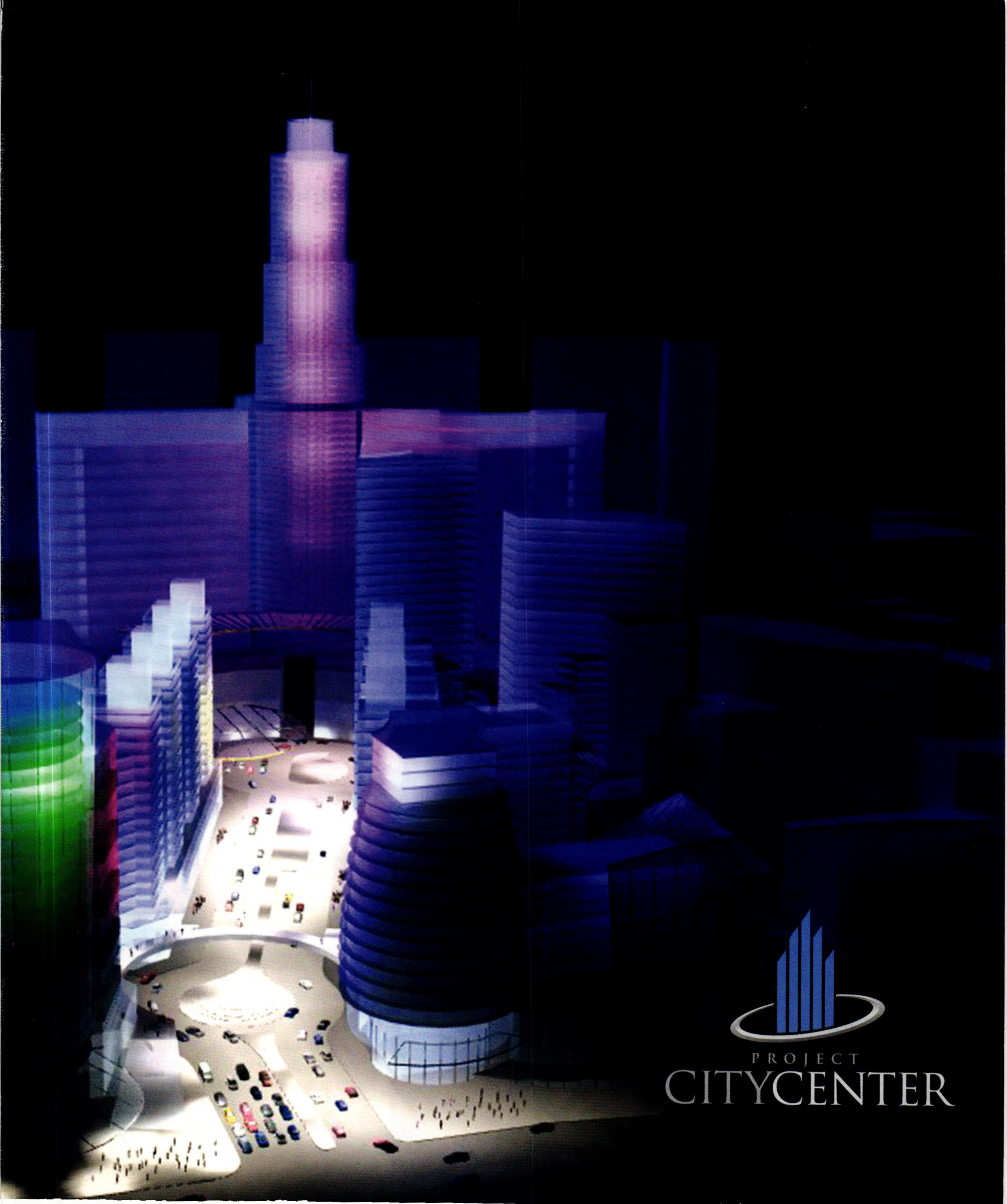
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The AIA Las Vegas and the Las Vegas  
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made ours a one-of-a-kind city.

STORIES BY JOSE GAMEZ, CHRISTOPHER  
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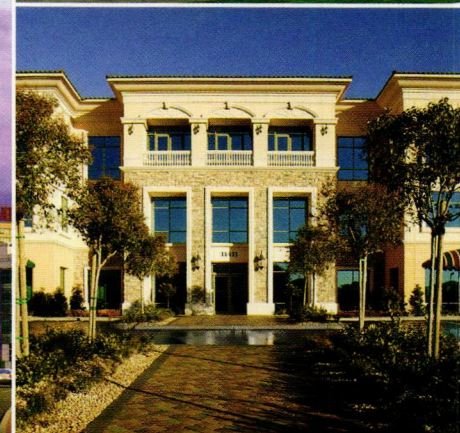
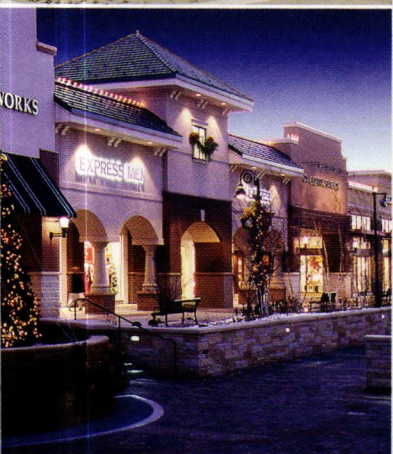
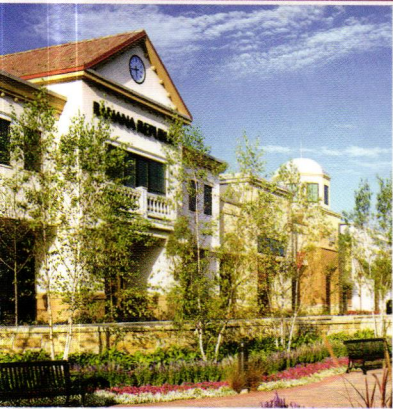
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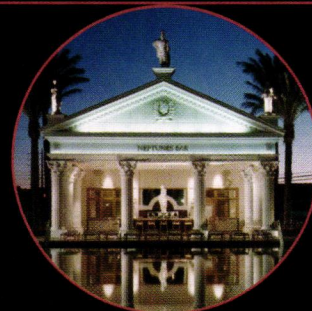
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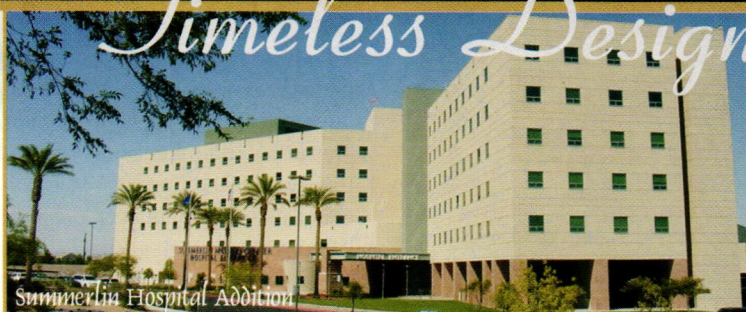


# Intelligent Architecture

## Timeless Design



The Summit Condominium Tower

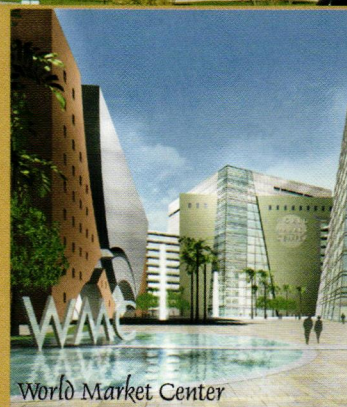


Summerlin Hospital Addition

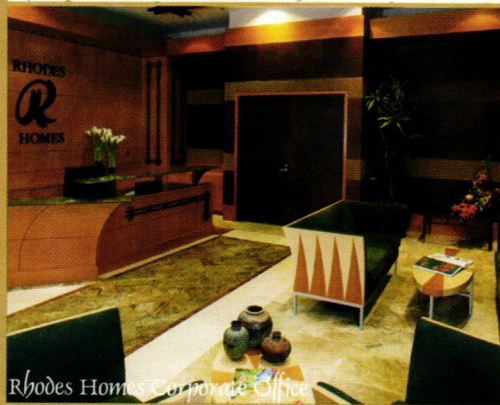
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## The Power of Architecture

**F**OR THE LAS VEGAS COMMUNITY, THIS IS A HISTORIC MOMENT. Over the last 100 years, generations of hard-working Southern Nevada citizens have carved out of the Mojave Desert a unique way of life and an economy that supports the most popular entertainment and resort community in the world. Strategic to marketing Las Vegas globally as the phenomenon it has become is an architecture and urban form that highly stimulates visitors as well as the day-to-day activities of residents, with a power that energizes the entire night. It is also an architecture and urban form, for better or worse, that influences and shapes the perspectives and perceptions of our guests, the natural and physical environment of this valley, our quality of life and the direction of our future.

Not only is 2005 the centennial for Las Vegas, it is the year the American Institute of Architects has its national convention here. This May, for the first time, more than 25,000 architects, guests and exhibitors from across the nation will observe "The Power of Architecture" here firsthand. Each will get to form his or her own perspective and perception of this place we all call home.

Along with residents, AIA visitors have the opportunity to celebrate the influence that planning, architecture and urban design has provided throughout the first 100 years of Las Vegas' life. The Las Vegas Chapter of the AIA has created "The Vegas Century" as a tribute, presenting eight categories of major influences on the evolution of our community. I hope each of you has the opportunity to enjoy this centennial tribute and its accompanying exhibition (see Page 98).

This, the fifth edition of *Architecture Las Vegas*, provides a preface for our readers for better understanding architecture, community development and the responsibilities architects have in service to society. For our AIA guests, we hope these articles will provide you with an overview of the issues regarding the planning and design of our buildings, spaces and style. We also hope you better understand our mission to create a place that is uniquely Las Vegas, that is compatible with the desert environment and is sustainable for our children's and grandchildren's future.

What happens today in Las Vegas does not stay here, as the local visitors and convention authority would like you to believe. What happens here evolved from something from somewhere else that was enhanced for use here, or it begins here as a successful experiment that is adapted as a successful model for use in other places around the world. Nevertheless, there is a power to this architecture and urban form that creates the aura of Las Vegas, which is our most important contribution.

A broad and diverse group of writers and perspectives this year extends this magazine's history of inquiry and exploration into Las Vegas architecture, the service that this AIA chapter and its members provide, and the other critical influences that shape the evolution of the Valley.

Alan Hess writes on the power of neon on the Las Vegas Strip, while Jennifer Robison covers the development of the Red Rock Desert Learning Center and the AIA Las Vegas Chapter's Legacy Project. Both of these will not only help us better educate our next generations here, but offer lessons to be shared around the country. There is a special profile on Klai Juba Architects, this year's recipient of the prestigious AIA Nevada Firm Award. Jose Gamez, a former UNLV architecture faculty member, reflects on *Learning from Las Vegas*. And there are many more stories in between, from New Urbanism Las Vegas-style to our high-rise phenomenon.

As this year's president of the AIA Las Vegas, I want to thank the editorial board, the writers and photographers, the creative whizzes at Dial V9 Design, and the advertisers for their contributions to this most successful publication. We have a new publishing team this year, and the Chapter wants to thank both Mach One Media Group and Vegas Ink, as well as our venerable editor, Phil Hagen, for their assistance with the magazine. And we thank our new distribution partners in this project, the *Las Vegas Business Press* and Nevada Public Radio, for helping *Architecture Las Vegas* greatly expand its readership.



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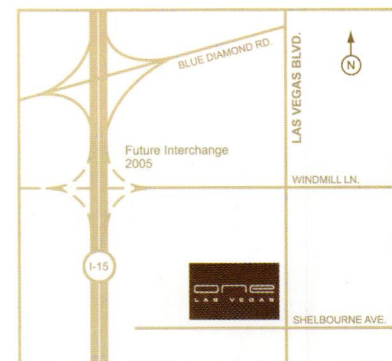
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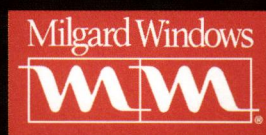
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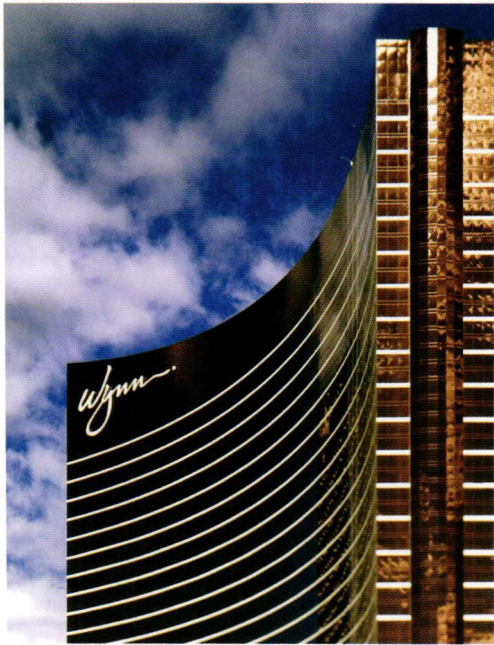
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## The Bronze Standard

*Critic Alan Hess measures Steve Wynn's latest Vegas paradigm shift*

**W**ITH STEVE WYNN'S PENCHANT FOR SECRECY (RIVALED ONLY by Stanley Kubrick's), the new 2,700-room Wynn Las Vegas hotel remains, as we write, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside a casino.

All we can know for sure now is that it has a swooshing, bronze-colored 50-story tower rising beyond a small, forested hill and a village-like cluster of buildings. It sits on the site of the 1950 Desert Inn, a desert modern showplace designed by Wayne McAllister and Hugh Taylor and famously operated by Wilbur Clark, Moe Dalitz and Howard Hughes.

But Wynn's track record is an open book, so we can read between the lines. The new Wynn Las Vegas will follow a familiar formula: a lux-glam resort hotel exploiting a distinctive blend of corporate modern and theme architecture. It will also include Wynn's signature touch: He always tweaks the formula with sufficient novelty to carve a new benchmark for the competition.

Of course this kind of one-upmanship has been a part of Las Vegas architecture ever since the second neon sign, bigger and brighter than the first, went up on Fremont Street in the early 1930s. Over his hotel-building career, Wynn (collaborating at times with Joel Bergman, Jon Jerde, Roger Thomas and Jacques Garcia) has shown himself both a savvy student of Las Vegas architectural traditions and a conspicuous iconoclast—literally a breaker of icons.

For example, he fully understands the role of the roadside spectacle ingrained in Las Vegas architecture since the enormous signs of the 1950s and 1960s, but he transformed those neon extravaganzas into three-dimensional volcanic pyrotechnics at the Mirage, then an animated pirate battle at Treasure Island, and then dancing

waters at Bellagio. Recognizing that the Strip sidewalk was becoming a show, he deftly designed his properties to take advantage of that urban reality.

And at Wynn Las Vegas, true to form, he pushes this tactic a step further. Now he moves the spectacle from the sidewalk and behind an artificial hillside covered in trees, at the heart of his hotel. The word is that this faux berm hides a faux lake around which the 111,000-square-foot casino and 18 restaurants gather; this lagoon reportedly will feature a show by Franco Dragone of Cirque du Soleil.

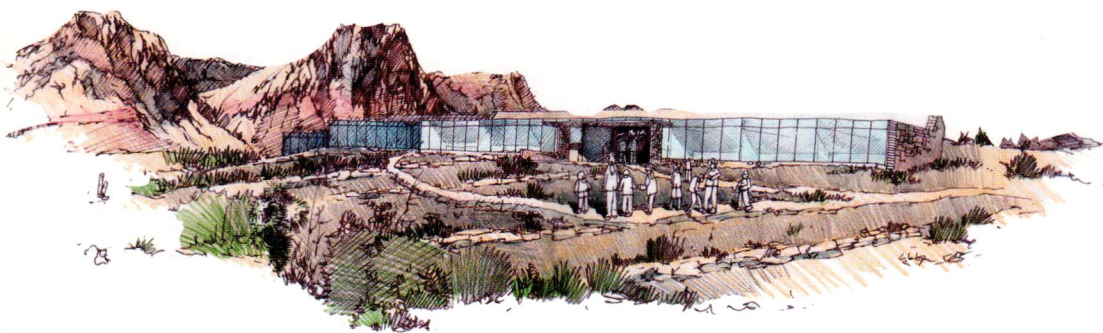
Wynn updates Vegas tradition in other ways. The svelte monolith, ornamented only with the name, is a new version of the classic Las Vegas billboard form, melding signs and buildings into architecture. Perhaps the most significant departure from the current norm lies in substituting a single slab tower for the tri-wing towers that have ruled Las Vegas since architect Martin Stern Jr. introduced that shape at the 1969 International (now the Las Vegas Hilton).

And while Wynn Las Vegas repeats the pattern of the Mirage and Bellagio by contrasting the skyline-scaled towers with a foreground of clustered, low-scale buildings and landscaping beckoning people to approach, the new hotel refines the trick of scale. In the older hotels a double order of windows on adjacent floors, ganged together, appear as a single, larger window, balancing the scale of the tall tower; now the Wynn clusters two floors between each horizontal speed line to achieve the same effect.

Though Steve Wynn is credited with reinventing Las Vegas, more accurately he refines it, reformulating Las Vegas architecture traditions into new forms that are astonishingly in touch with the populist heart of America. ■

Photos by  
Joseph Pickett III





## Reality Show and Tell

*A unique learning center will immerse fifth-graders in the desert for some bold lessons in adaption*

**T**HE LAS VEGAS SPRINGS PRESERVE, THE COUNTY'S DESERT WETLANDS Park, Henderson's Acacia Demonstration Garden—all are leading indicators that we're experiencing a naissance of environmental awareness. But an even bolder project in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area is being planned, and it promises to take this vital education beyond exhibits and demonstrations.

On a portion of 300 acres along State Route 159 just east of Blue Diamond, the Bureau of Land Management plans to develop the \$41 million Red Rock Desert Learning Center. There, on the grounds of the Oliver Ranch, area fifth-graders will spend up to four days at a time learning to adapt their Las Vegas lifestyles to the delicate Mojave Desert in order to see how humans can get along better with nature.

"The center is designed to be really engaging," says David Frommer, AIA, assistant director of planning and design at UNLV and an adviser to the center. "Students won't just be viewing interpretive boards or seeing a managed experience, they'll be more immersed in the notion of what a desert is, what our flora and fauna are, what our geology is. They'll get a sense of the rhythms and sensibility of living in our environment."

The lessons will hit home right away. Each dorm's trombe walls—thick structures that absorb heat during the day and release it at night—will include movable insulation panels that allow students to control the passive heating and cooling. Half of the Desert Learning Center's energy will come from solar power, and it will use only 50 gallons of water per day, compared with the 230 gallons per person used by the typical Las Vegas family. Children will have to chart their dorm's water allocation.

"Because of the growth here, the pressure on public lands has greatly increased," says Michael Reiland, BLM project coordinator. "This facility can teach them how the environment interacts with us, so when they grow up, they'll have a good basis for making environmental decisions."

The center, designed by Tucson's Line and Space Architects, will open in 2008, says primary designer Les Wallach, AIA. There will be sleeping quarters for 105 children, a dining hall, laboratories and an administration building. Outside, 14 separate teaching venues will pepper the site.

Designers have scrapped plans to demolish the original outbuildings that the Oliver family constructed in the 1930s and will partially rehab them "as venues for storytelling," Wallach says.

There is already a pretty good story to tell, as the completed center will be given a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council—part of the first wave of green projects finally coming our way. ■

Story by  
Jennifer Robison

## New & Notable

By JENNIFER ROBISON

### Vegas finally in the LEED

It first emerged in local custom-home design about three years ago: a sensitivity toward environmentally friendly architecture, with an emphasis on day-lighting, natural building materials and xeriscape. But as this year's New & Notable reveals, green design has gone mainstream. Virtually every public building on the drawing boards—from city halls to schools—calls for eco-friendly elements. Architects are even employing green design in private office parks, as commercial developers see dollars and common sense in eco-friendly construction. The gold standard in green building is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating from the U.S. Green Building Council. That measure didn't exist anywhere in the state until late last summer, when the **JMA Architecture Studios-designed telecommunications building at CCSN's Cheyenne campus** opened. Now, JMA officials say, as many as 12 structures in planning statewide are registered to seek LEED certification.

Most significant among planned LEED projects in the Las Vegas Valley is a **JMA-designed expansion of Las Vegas City Hall**. The 30-year-old, 10-story City Hall at Stewart Avenue and Fourth Street is stuffed to the gills with bureaucrats, as the booming Valley has demanded more public services. To accommodate the overflow, JMA designed a six-story, 165,000-square-foot addition fronting a pedestrian plaza across from City Hall on Fourth. Clad in limestone, precast concrete and bronze glazing to complement the existing structure, the \$39 million building will link to City Hall via a "landmark art bridge," JMA designers say. At the expansion's apex is an arching roof, a motif continued in a smaller arc over the entrance and in curving pillars punctuating the windows. No construction start date is scheduled. In November, **Mayor Oscar Goodman** said he would consider scrapping City Hall's present location altogether for new digs on land near Downtown that the city purchased from Union Pacific. Since his remarks, though, the city has continued to buy neighboring properties around Stewart and Fourth for the planned addition.

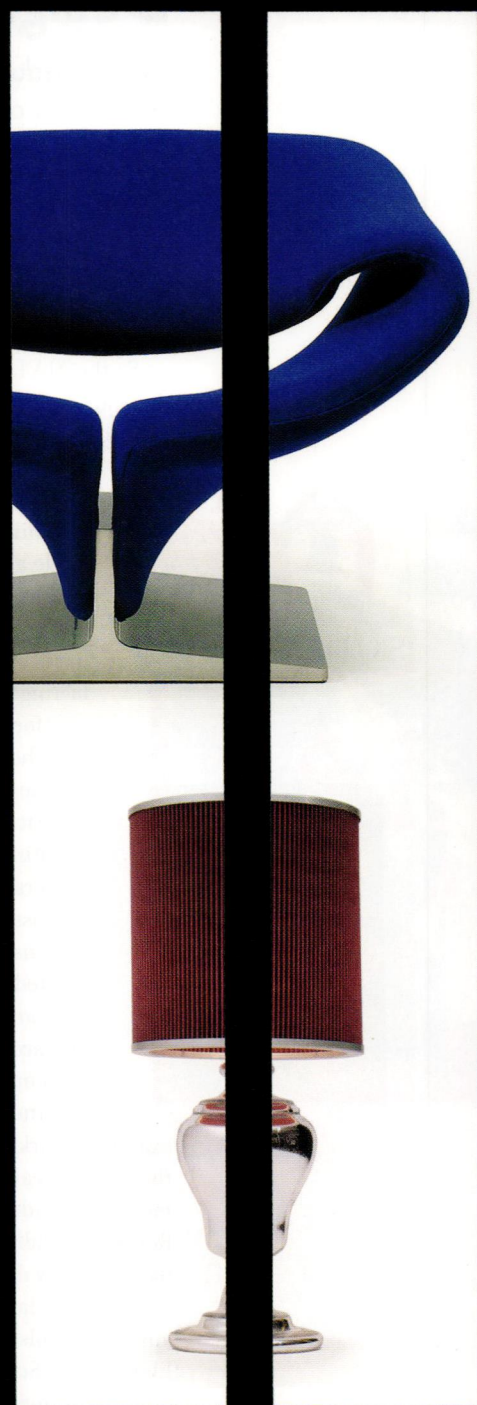
### Schools turning green, too

"This is not your father's vocational high school," says Steve Swisher, AIA, about the **Career & Technical Center** that his firm, **Swisher & Hall**, has designed for the Clark County School District. So how does it differ? Let us count the ways. First, it integrates career training and the standard reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic instead of sending kids to traditional high schools for half the day to learn the basics. Second, this version is infused with the latest technology. Its auto shop uses the latest diagnostic computers, and the computer networks are digital. It also features a working flower shop, a 750-seat banquet hall and a training kitchen designed by local culinary star **Gustav Mauler**.

Finally, it will be the first county school to merit a LEED rating. The building will use half the energy and a quarter of the water of a typical high school, employing such efficiencies as day-lighting, artificial



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# Designed for Learning

*AIA Nevada hopes its Legacy will soon be educating the nation on school environments*

**T**WO HUNDRED AND TWENTY. THOSE ARE TWO NUMBERS DALE SCHEIDEMAN, AIA, can't wait to bring up in his presentation at the AIA National Convention here in May. The Clark County School District will have built 200 schools in the 20 years between 1988 and 2008. "Nobody else in the universe can say that," says the architect who directs the district's new-school and facility-planning efforts.

So the AIA Las Vegas chapter's Legacy Project for this year's convention—an option for all host chapters—is a natural fit: The Design for Learning Foundation will raise money for grants to encourage demonstrations of, and research into, how educational structures affect students' ability to learn and achieve.

"This area is under-researched because people have just made assumptions over the years," Scheideman says. "Actual research documents have been very hard to find. Everyone knows daylight is good for kids, but there are probably only two or three studies that have examined that. It's partly about collecting information, too, because there's not a central repository for this kind of research. It's pretty scattered."

Scheideman will issue requests for Legacy proposals from architects at the May convention. An AIA Las Vegas fund-raiser prior to that should bring in \$50,000 to \$100,000 to finance the resulting grants. Scheideman also plans to enlist ideas from the university community nationwide.

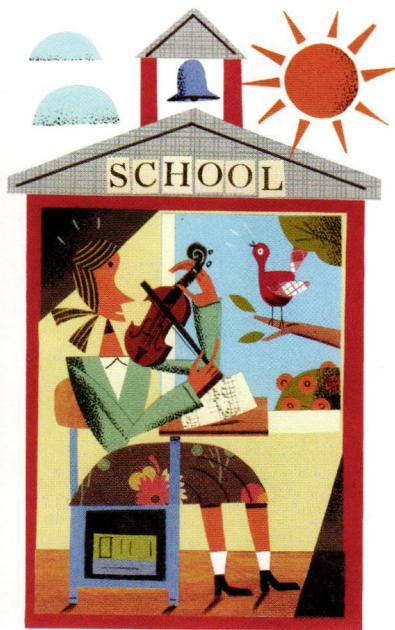
Possible areas of study will span every conceivable educational topic. If, say, a designer, educator or researcher wanted to study the effects of classroom acoustics or class size on learning, the foundation would have a series of articles or research documents available.

Some studies will be localized due to unique conditions or situations in Las Vegas that others can learn from. For example, Clark County has "more string orchestras than anywhere in the world because the culture of the Valley revolves around entertainment," Scheideman says. "People want their kids involved in that. Robison Middle School has 1,500 kids, and 550 of them are in the band. So how does it impact the learning process?"

The foundation's work could also help address special needs among schools with fewer resources. The School of Mines at McCaw Elementary School and the Biosphere at Vanderburg Elementary School, both in Henderson, are examples of targeted community support generating significant scientific programs for local students. However, some schools, Scheideman says, "would like to do those things but have not been able to get community support." He'd like to see the foundation help remedy that.

In addition to planning annual fund-raisers to support the program, Scheideman will continue to focus on his magical number. The district opened 14 schools this academic year, with another 12 on tap for next year. "We're just staying even," he says. "We have kept up with growth, but we're not ahead of it."

Perhaps Design for Learning will help the district—and those around the country—make bigger strides in the future. ■



Story by  
Jennifer Robison

Illustration by  
Rich Lillash

turf, waterless urinals and 520 thermal loops burrowed into the ground to supply heating. Construction will begin in February, with an anticipated opening in fall 2006. The \$44 million school has already inspired additional change: The school district is requiring that all new designs save 50 percent on energy costs.

Another educational project aiming for LEED certification is the \$28 million, 54,000-square-foot **Desert Living Center**, under construction at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve on Valley View Boulevard near U.S. 95. **Lucchesi Galati Architects Inc.** designed five buildings oriented to optimize natural light and solar heating. In addition, the structures are integrated into the land, allowing the earth to provide thermal insulation. Rammed-earth and straw-bale construction create thermal mass for improved passive heating and cooling. Other eco-friendly measures include radiant floor heating, lighting sensors to shut off electricity as needed, solar hot-water heaters and reclaimed water systems. An adjoining five-acre demonstration garden will offer tips on desert-tolerant plants, irrigation, landscape lighting and planting. A constructed wetland will treat all gray and black water in the preserve, for reuse in the Desert Living Center's toilets and gardens. The objective: to promote sustainable living in the Mojave Desert. Locals can start taking cues from the center when it opens in May 2006.

The Las Vegas Springs Preserve will also house the new **Nevada State Museum**, in design now and slated for completion in 2007. The **Paul Steelman Design Group** is drawing up plans for a two-story, 69,000-square-foot structure that reflects the site's history as the watering hole for the Valley's first human inhabitants. In telling the story of those very first locals and their experiences with the desert as a living environment, the exterior will resemble shifting sands, while the interior will assume the feel of a canyon. The museum will "hug" the landscape and have several axes bisecting it to create spaces for exhibits, a research library, special events, storage for the permanent collection and administration. Like other facilities on the preserve, the museum is designed for energy efficiency.

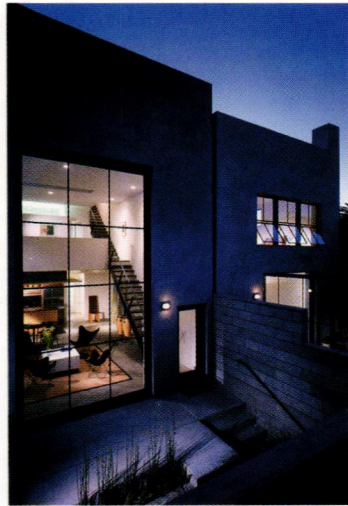
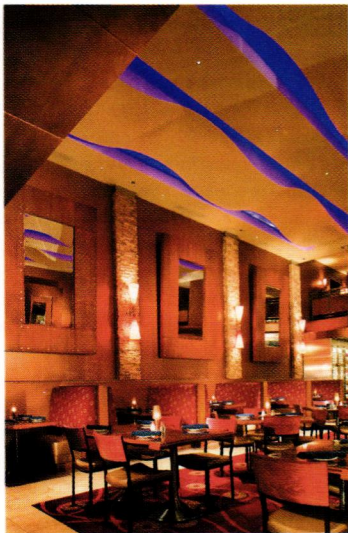
Eco-friendly educational design isn't confined to the public sector. The **Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy's third phase** will include sustainable features such as day-lighting, with liberal use of clerestory windows and light wells. **Carpenter Sellers Associates** is designing the phase, which will include a 25,000-square-foot gym, a 3,500-square-foot addition to the elementary school and a 50,000-square-foot high school, which will fulfill the academy's ultimate K-12 mission. The high school, scheduled to open in fall 2006, will include science and language labs, a media center, administrative offices, a commons, a research library and a 200-student lecture hall. The angular, contemporary design has to accommodate two key facts of life for the institution: its cramped quarters in an existing neighborhood at West Lake Mead Boulevard and J Street and the expectations of donors. CSA has addressed donor demands by planning buildings that are cohesive yet distinctive, each with unique shapes and forms so segments of the school will have their own identity—providing an array of donor-naming opportunities. For example, Beanie Baby king **Ty Warner** recently anointed the middle school in his name. **Sletten Construction** is building the addition.

The granddaddy of Vegas private schools—and the only Catholic high school in town—is receiving a



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# Hot Hot Hot Spots

*The latest of the greatest Strip interiors range from a modern cave lounge to a Super Potato sense-sation*

**A**LL THE STRIP IS A WORLD STAGE, AND ONE-UPMANSHIP FUELS THE drama. Nowhere is this more played out than in the restaurants, nightclubs and ultralounges of our megaresorts. Here are the latest and greatest acts of hospitality design:

**Mix Restaurant and Lounge**—On the 43rd floor of THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, French designer Patrick Jouin divined an ethereal space worthy of the world's most Michelin-starred chef, Alain Ducasse. Linked by a partially open kitchen, Mix mixes a modern cave lounge with an empyrean dining room where worship is in order. A steel corridor leads to a grand room filled with a 24-foot halo of 15,000 suspended glass bubbles hand-blown in Murano, Italy, at a cost of

nearly \$750,000. Within the chandelier is a suspended silver-leaf "pearl" platform that houses the VIP dining area. Even the furniture was designed by Jouin, including the chairs (built by Cassina) and the gloss-white cocoons that seat parties of four.

**Sensi**—The Japanese firm Super Potato designed a culinary theater in Bellagio's new Spa Tower to complement Chef Martin Heierling's world cuisine. Four glass-enclosed kitchens in a sunken arena in the middle of the dining room provide an interactive stage in which guests profit from their proximity to food preparation without all of the bustling (the sense of sound isn't always so carefully considered

in Vegas). Earthy design elements include walls of water and Japanese Aji stone, from hunks to slender slabs. The two chef's tables—one wood, the other stone—were hand-chiseled by monks with the intent to preserve the imperfections.

**La Bete**—Originally conceived by contemporary French designer Jacques Garcia, the concept for the European-style cabaret inside the new Wynn Las Vegas was executed by Todd-Avery Lenahan of the Vegas-based Avery Brooks & Associates. No big box nightclub here. You won't find a 90-degree angle inside La Bete—all womanly curves with boudoir-style draping in lively shades of pink, fuchsia and chartreuse. Sparkling chandeliers hang above dining-style seating. The dance floor sits underneath a billowy tent. In the outdoor grotto, La Bete is tucked around an 80-foot-tall tree and waterfall with dazzling lighting effects.

**Teatro Euro Bar**—Adam Tihany's small spaceship of a bar made a splash-landing in the MGM's casino last fall. While a handful of his architectural elements have been refined to meet the nightclub's changing needs—the transformation of the champagne bar into a catwalk and the removal of booths for a small dance floor—Teatro still features Ferrari-red leather benches and stainless-steel touches throughout. The backlit projection wall of glass bottles displays such sensual images as female silhouettes and flames. The highlight of this very sexy space, however, is its circular shape, giving every seat a VIP vantage point. ■



Mix's centerpiece is a \$750,000 chandelier that bathes the main dining room in hand-blown glass bubbles.

Story by  
Amy Schmidt

new campus altogether. And though it's not aiming for LEED certification, plans for **Bishop Gorman High School's new campus** do call for extensive, energy-saving day-lighting. The 50-year-old school will relocate from its city-bound six acres on Maryland Parkway near Sahara Avenue to a 35-acre parcel near Hualapai Way and Russell Road in Summerlin. **KGA Architecture** is designing a three-building campus with 187,000 square feet of space, including a 300-seat chapel. Four courtyards "pay reverence to courtyards in Catholic monasteries and offer a protective, calming environment in which to fully engage in the educational experience," the designers state. Outdoor spaces include an art courtyard with night lighting, botanical gardens that showcase native flora and a chapel courtyard with a rose garden for quiet reflection. Architectural materials enhance religious connotations and reflect the school's desert context: Stone facing and paint themes reflect the nearby Spring Mountains and surrounding neighborhoods, while tiled roof elements and rhythmic window patterns recall traditional ecclesiastical design. The new school will also allow Bishop Gorman to up its enrollment from 850 to 1,200. The project, estimated to cost as much as \$45 million, will open in August 2006.

For a brief time in mid-2006, the city's newest public high school and its third oldest will stand side by side. The \$75 million **reconstruction of Rancho High School** near East Owens Avenue and Bruce Street is under way on the current plant's athletic fields; when it's finished in July 2006, the present facility will be razed and made over as sports venues. **Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects'** designs include a 330,000-square-foot building with facilities for the school's medical and aviation magnet programs. A 2,700-seat gym and a library complex with a computer research lab are also on tap. The school district will aim for LEED certification.

## Big plans on campus

Creating a sense of community isn't easy at any commuter campus. But the design firms of **Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects** and **Ellerbe Becket** have a solution: a new **UNLV student union** designed to encourage interaction among scholars, faculty and administrators. The 135,000-square-foot building will have dining areas, student activity centers, a 300-seat theater and retail spaces on its ground floor. The second floor will offer a computer lab and help center, student lounges, meeting spaces and a ballroom. Student government functions will reside on the third floor. Abundant outdoor gathering space will include a canopy-covered plaza and a 20-foot-deep balcony stretching the length of the building. Most distinctive: a canvas-shaded courtyard on the building's south side. It will connect the union and nine cooling towers that take in hot air from above, convert it via evaporative cooling and redistribute it below into the courtyard—where the cooler microclimate will spur summertime use of the space. The \$32.4 million building will break ground in August, and pros and students should be mingling by fall semester 2007.

In other UNLV news, the \$19 million expansion and renovation of **John S. Wright Hall** is wrapping up. **KGA Architecture** designed the project, which calls for rehabbing an existing 20,000 square feet and adding a three-story, 60,000-square-foot structure of stucco and sandstone. **Burke & Associates** is the general





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## A Happening Workplace

*'Town Center' concept gets a powerhouse ad firm's community and creativity flowing again*

**I**T IS THE POP-CULTURE CATCHPHRASE OF THE 21ST CENTURY: "WHAT Happens Here, Stays Here." And for that you can thank the folks at R&R Partners, Nevada's largest advertising and public-relations agency, who create the media messages that sell Las Vegas to the world.

You might also thank Lucchesi Galati Architects. Though the firm wasn't there for the brainstorming session that spawned the most repeated ad slogan since "Where's the beef?," it did, at R&R's behest, design the workspace that has generated the kind of critical collaboration and team unity that the multimedia firm lacked in its previous environs, a sprawling business complex on West Sahara Avenue.

"It was extremely important to us," recalls Jim King, R&R's chief financial officer and principal who oversaw the project, "to have a new space that not only reflected how we work, but how we play and how we function as a family."

The new headquarters is a building in Summerlin whose shell was already there. For the interior, R&R's instructions to Lucchesi Galati were to "stitch their culture and community back together," recalls principal Craig Galati, AIA. "They wanted a space that would really communicate how they work, how fun they were to work with and the creative dynamic that happens."

Opened in 2002 in the shadows of Red Rock, R&R's new home isn't so much a 44,000-square-foot corporate office as it is a miniature town inhabited by more than 140 "residents."

The two-story, L-shaped space is wide open in every sense of the phrase. Passing the reception area, the golden walls narrow and the ceiling slopes down ever so slightly; and then, just as you reach the polished-steel staircase that leads to the

Story by  
Matt Jacob

*continued on page 22*

contractor on the project, which will house the history, political science and anthropology departments. Construction went to bid in the fall on the **Science, Engineering and Technology Building**. The \$75 million, 191,000-square-foot project, designed by **Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini**, is scheduled for completion by spring 2007.

This summer, **Kitchell Contractors** will start work on the \$50 million **UNLV Student Recreation Center** that **Indigo Architecture** designed with **DMJM Design** and **Hastings & Chivetta**. The 170,000 square feet of space, to be completed by January 2007, will include indoor basketball courts, an indoor track, racquetball courts, an outdoor pool, sand volleyball courts, a climbing wall and fitness equipment.

The tide of college construction won't ebb in coming years, as the Board of Regents approved a \$214 million capital request list for higher-ed projects statewide in the 2005-07 budget cycle. Not all of the projects will be financed, but included on the Southern Nevada wish list, in order of priority: \$24 million for a new building for **UNLV's Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**; \$9 million for a **liberal arts building at Nevada State College** in Henderson; \$14.4 million for a virtual-reality military training center at the **Desert Research Institute**; \$5 million for an **automotive technology building at CCSN's Cheyenne Campus**; \$9 million for a **UNLV student services building**; \$5.3 million for a **CCSN Pahrump Education Complex**; and \$30.5 million for a **Learning Center/Classroom building on CCSN's West Charleston Campus**. The projects are in various stages of design; some—such as the Desert Research Institute training center—have yet to go to bid. For additional information on the status of each project, check with the state public works board at [spwb.state.nv.us](http://spwb.state.nv.us).

## Action along the Boulevard

At \$2.5 billion, Wynn Las Vegas may be the most expensive resort Vegas has ever built (see Page 13), but it's certainly not the only new game in town. Caesars Entertainment Inc. is continuing its gradual overhaul of the nearly 40-year-old **Caesars Palace**; construction will wrap up in the third quarter of 2005 on a \$376 million expansion of the company's flagship property. Design firm **Bergman, Walls & Associates Ltd., Las Vegas**, drew up the plans, which are anchored by a **26-story, 949-room luxury tower**. How luxurious is it? Rooms begin at 650 square feet—about 50 percent bigger than standard high-end suites in other major markets. The most luxe suites will be 2,500 square feet. The top floor will remain unfinished, in case Caesars execs ever decide to top their taller neighbors. Also on tap: a VIP lounge, a business center, wedding chapels and new retail and dining space. The convention center will grow by 140,000 square feet.

**Las Vegas Sands Inc.** has broken ground on the **Palazzo** at the Strip and Sands Avenue adjacent to the company's Venetian, sharing its glitzy Italian theme. Preliminary plans call for a \$1.6 billion, 3,025-suite property with six high-roller villas of up to 11,000 square feet, a 105,000-square-foot casino, a 375,000-square-foot shopping mall and 500,000 square feet of convention space. The 53-story structure will become one of the Strip's tallest, dwarfed only by the Stratosphere, the Trump International Hotel & Tower and the Summit high-rise condos.

**Bergman, Walls & Associates** has designed the \$350 million, 64-story **Trump Tower**, which is sched-



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executive offices—boom!—the entire structure opens up. Exposed ceilings reveal galvanized ductwork, pipes and conduits, giving off a warehouse loft vibe.

At this point, you're standing at the edge of the central hub, known as "Town Center," from which R&R's various limbs sprout. This 1,500-square-foot circular gathering spot has become the company's heartbeat.

"They have all of these different departments, but they're one company," Galati says. "So we asked, 'How do you create the autonomy that you need for all the different groups, and yet bring them all together?' And we thought it was just like a small community: You come together in a town square. It's a place that belongs to everybody: You have your own individual work station, but you also have

some ownership in this community space where the whole office can get together for parties, for training, for meetings, for presentations."

The "Town Center" concept accomplished the ultimate goal of bringing the family back together in a fun, lively environment, King says. To wit: A large mural that mimics the Chicago Mercantile Exchange covers the north wall of Town Center, park benches line its rim and two 10-by-12-foot glass-paneled "garage doors" open up to an outdoor courtyard replete with palm trees, a fireplace and built-in barbecue. If that's not enough, there's also a pool table at one end of the center and a Ping-Pong table at the other (yes, games are allowed during work hours).

"Everything feeds off of Town Center—our break room, the entrance from the outside, the access to upstairs," King says. "You could work at a lot of places where you come into the reception area and you go down Hall A or Hall B, and Hall A never sees Hall B again unless they have a meeting. Here, people are crisscrossing through that space all day long."

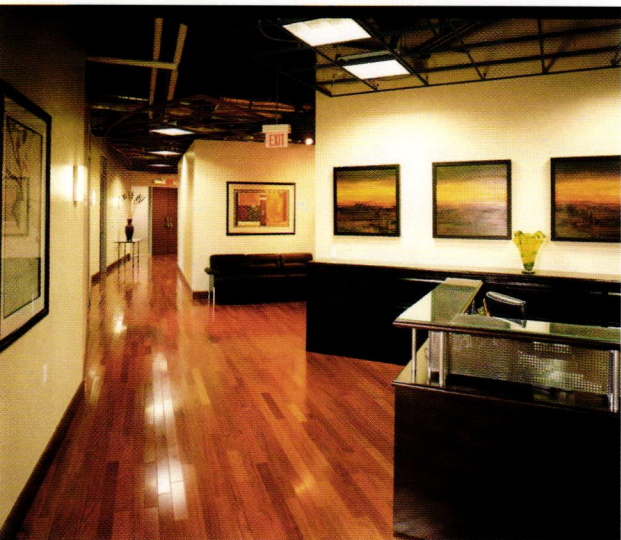
Yes, most of the work does get done in cubicles. The difference here is that employees aren't left feeling like lab rats. Lucchesi Galati employed a "Main Street" concept where the slate tile floor cuts a swath through the building's interior, with various departments just off the beaten path.

Earth-tone colors—including mustard gold, burnt orange, coffee brown, olive and taupe—dominate the walls of the interior, and as an added design touch, poles that resemble streetlights are scattered throughout. The poles, which feature ledge-stone bases, double as—what else?—advertising displays.

While most employees work on the ground floor family-style, King and the other R&R honchos do their business above the masses on a second-floor mezzanine that hovers over Town Center, once again furthering the open-air concept.

"Mission accomplished," King says when asked for an overall critique of Lucchesi Galati's work. "We couldn't be happier with the space."

King and Galati are already discussing expansion plans, as one of the tenants in the 68,000-square-foot building is on its way out. What do they have in mind for that space? Well, for now, let's just say the two parties would prefer to fall back on that famous R&R slogan. ■



Upstairs at R&R's HQ, home of the PR firm's executive offices.

uled to break ground in spring 2005 on the Strip just north of Fashion Show, on part of the New Frontier's site. (New Frontier owner **Phil Ruffin** is a partner in the project.) The tower of 24-karat gold glass will have 1,286 hotel condominiums ranging from 1,775 to 3,550 square feet. When it opens in fall 2006, the property will also house a spa and a renowned New York restaurant yet to be announced.

Poised to dwarf the Palazzo and give Trump Tower a run for its money is—prepare yourself—a Ferris wheel. Luxor designer **Veldon Simpson** is working with casino developer **Archon Corporation** on a "**Palace by the Sea**" resort concept on the site of the now-shuttered Wet 'n Wild water park on the Strip south of the Sahara. Archon and Simpson are holding details close to the vest, but they have announced plans for a 600-foot observation wheel and a 50-story structure with 3,250 hotel rooms and time-shares. About 80 suites would be in boats moored on a manmade lake. Archon officials say they're still in the "predevelopment" stage and have no concrete start or completion dates for construction.

While local kids mourned the loss of the water park, design purists lamented the demise of another Vegas institution: the **La Concha motel** at 2955 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Demolished in phases in 2003 and 2004, the Paul Revere Williams-designed property, a space-age, Google-style delight that recalled mid-20th century Los Angeles, has made way for the **Majestic Resort and Residences**. The **Paul Steelman Design Group** envisions a \$250 million Art Deco project that will include a five-star, 37-floor Conrad hotel with 442 suites, and a 42-story condominium tower with 144 units priced from \$850,000 to \$3 million. The homes will range from 2,450 to 3,600 square feet and include luxury staples such as stone and hardwood floors, granite counters, wireless Internet access and floor-to-ceiling glass walls for unobstructed Strip views. The adjoining **Majestic Court and Marketplace** will have 100,000 square feet of restaurants and shops.

It might be off the beaten tourism path, but the Old Mormon Fort marks the first attempt by non-natives to settle the Las Vegas Valley. After getting a feel for what has since developed on the Strip, head to Washington Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard North near Downtown to see how it all started. **MGM Construction** out of Salt Lake just wrapped up construction on the \$1.5 million **Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort Visitors Center**. The project, which **Eric Strain**, AIA, of **assemblageSTUDIO** designed for the state's Division of Parks, establishes a narrative path through history, recalling the materials and landscape of the original structure. The 5,000-square-foot building earned a Merit Award in AIA Nevada's Design Excellence Program in 2000. It also concludes redevelopment of the Mormon Fort site.

## Faster, safer and happier trails

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 inspired many necessary—but not always convenient—changes in air travel. Exhibit A: the gigantic bomb-detection machines soaking up space in the passenger check-in areas at McCarran International Airport. However, upon completion of a new **inline baggage-screening system** later this year, travelers will once again greet wide-open spaces at the ticketing counters. The purpose of the **Domingo Cambeiro Corporation**-designed system, which **Flagship Construction Company** is building, is twofold. The \$120 million *continued on page 104*

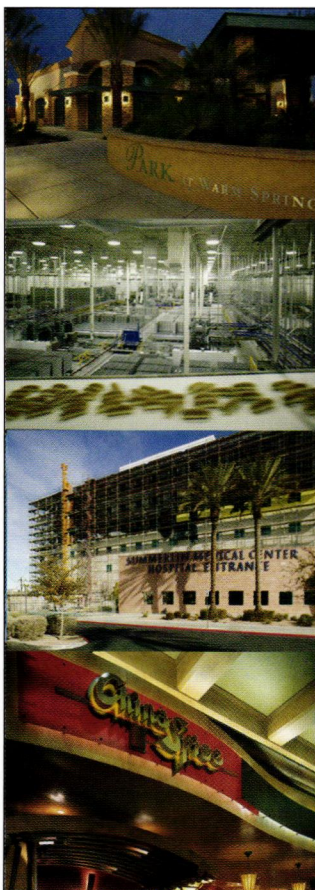


## Extraordinary Entertainment Architecture



Harrah's Rincon Casino & Resort, Valley Center, CA

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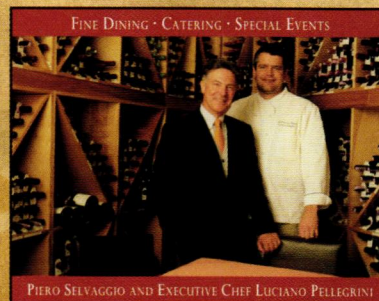
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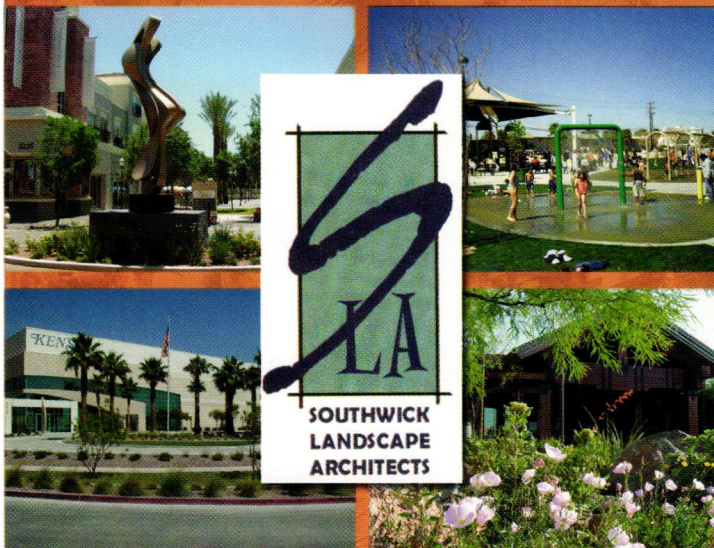
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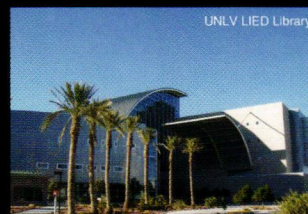
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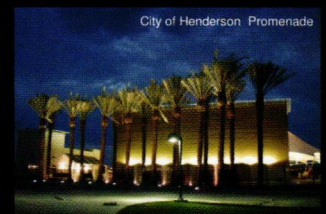
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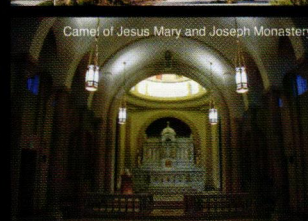
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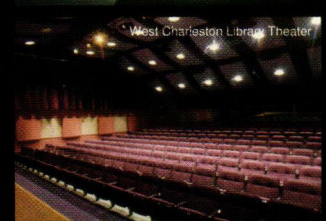
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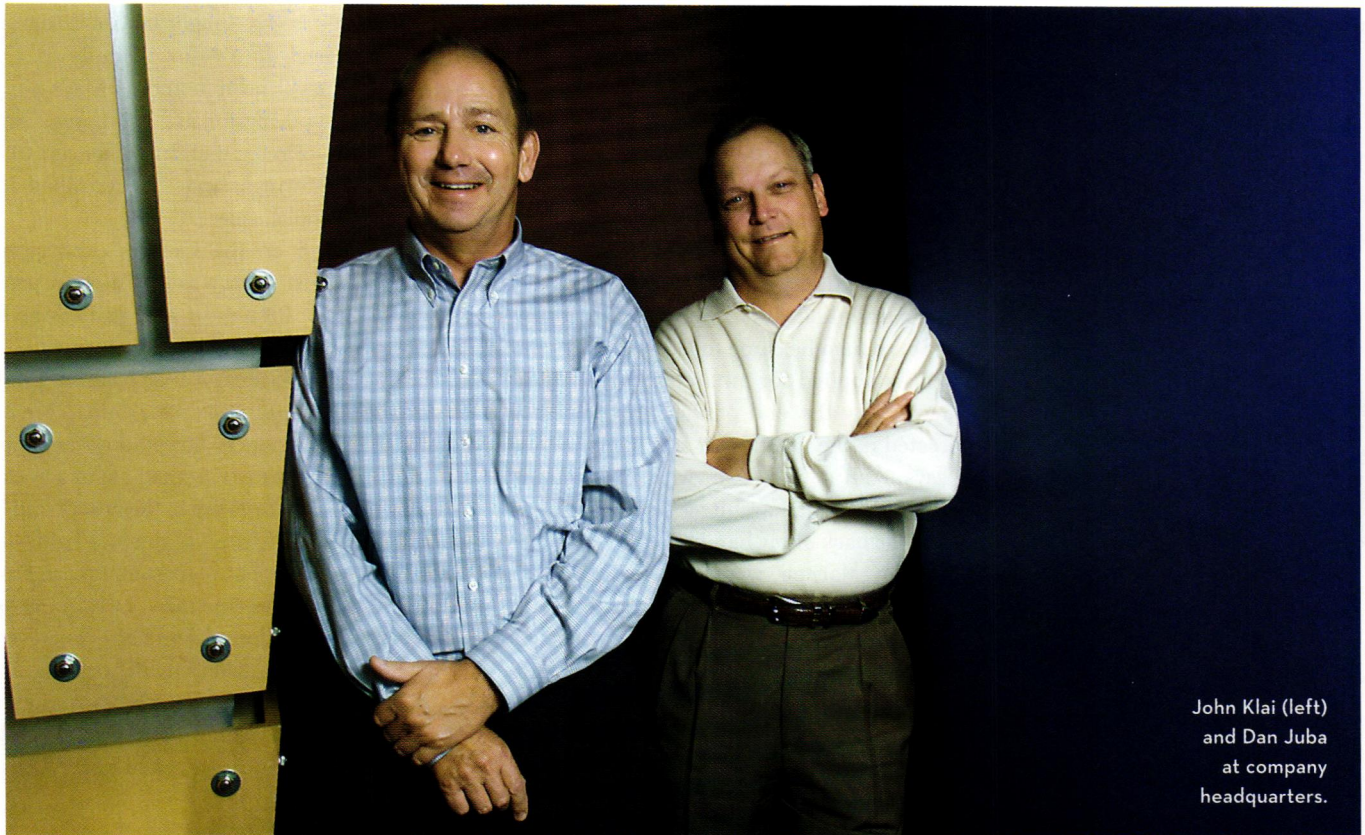


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John Klai (left)  
and Dan Juba  
at company  
headquarters.

## Movers and Shapers

*What would Vegas be like without Fargo? Here's the story of how John Klai and Dan Juba started one of the Strip's most valuable architectural connections*

**L**AS VEGAS IS A CITY THAT HAS FAMOUSLY EMBRACED MANY other places in its architecture. New Orleans and New York, the Far East and the Old West, Ancient Rome and poetic Burma—there's practically no theme that can't come true here.

Even as an underlying theme, North Dakota still had to be a long shot.

Yet that's what John Klai, AIA, is demonstrating (albeit unintentionally) as he presses his index fingers against a 1978 aerial photograph of Las Vegas, pointing to empty lots near Caesars Palace and, a few inches to the east, the Maxim. He's standing in the Klai Juba Architects conference room, where the walls are adorned with blown-up aerials old and new, and he's marking the spots where it all started for him and Dan Juba, AIA. Almost simultaneously, each designed a high-rise addition (Klai for Caesars, Juba for the Maxim), both as architects who had never built anything before.

Arms locked in place, Klai steps sideways to a neighboring map that shows the same area today, and he plants his fingers on the same sites. He has a second point: to illustrate how much Vegas and the Strip have grown in just a quarter century. "Back when we started, you couldn't go anywhere without there being a dirt road," he says, "and now look at it."

What also jumps out is how much of the map those two graduates from North Dakota State have shaped along one of the world's most famous corridors. In 12 years with Marnell Corrao Associates, the pair had a hand in dozens of expansions, alterations, additions and original designs, from Caesars and the Forum Shops (Klai) to the Rio and Stardust (Juba). And over the last decade as Klai Juba, they have served some of the Strip's biggest players with key renovations (the MGM Grand), major additions (Hard Rock Hotel) and groundbreaking startups (Mandalay Bay/Four Seasons).

For this last bit of Las Vegas cartography, Klai Juba earned the 2004 AIA Nevada Architecture Firm Award, which honors consistently distinguished work. At the presentation, the AIA's Herman Orcutt called their casino projects a reflection of "the best of the Las Vegas look." He also praised their professional and community service, which includes the firm's funding of an annual UNLV architecture scholarship as well as the Klai Juba Lecture Series.

It makes you wonder what Las Vegas (not to mention Fargo) would be like if Klai hadn't wandered into a job in the desert one summer long ago, or if both had remained retired 10 years ago, when they had written off architecture for good.

Story by  
Phil Hagen

Photo by  
Jim Laurie





Architect John Wald, recently named a full partner in the firm, was the lead designer on one of Klai Juba's latest projects, Panorama Towers (below).

AFTER GRADUATING WITH FIVE-YEAR DEGREES IN THE SPRING OF '78, Dan Juba took what amounted to an internship with a firm in Seattle, while John Klai went down to Las Vegas for a month or so to house-sit for some recently transplanted friends from North Dakota.

Klai adapted easily to the surrounds. "It was like you plopped Fargo down in the desert instead of the prairie," he says. It probably helped that the house had a pool.

But the level of temptation was slightly different than Fargo's, and after a month Klai was running low on "entertainment funds." So, though he came to Las Vegas with no thought of staying, he applied for an architect's position with Marnell Corrao. "By the end of the interview they said if I was interested in the position, it started tomorrow," Klai says. And so it began, with instructions to spend his first two days as an architect getting to know Caesars Palace "like the back of my hand."

What the boss, Tony Marnell, wanted was someone to land the right location for the hotel's 24-story addition, and by the end of Klai's reconnaissance, he had the drawings for what would be the Fantasy Tower, part of Caesars' \$65 million expansion project. Marnell, whom he had yet to meet, was evidently pleased, as Klai ended up with the rest of the project (the Olympic Casino, Omnimax Theatre and People Mover), as well as a little something extra in his paycheck—a quarter-an-hour raise, boosting him to \$7.25.

Juba wasn't faring as well pay-wise up in Seattle ("I made more money working for the railroad during college"), and it was even worse opportunity-wise. So he packed and headed for Vegas to try his luck. "Klai told me what he was doing and how much he was getting paid, and I thought it sounded like a pretty good deal," he says. He flew down on the Wednesday before Labor Day, brought his résumé to Marnell on Thursday, and by Friday he was a full-time Las Vegas architect.

"I was out of work for about 12 hours," Juba says. "It was hard to find architects back then. Graduate architects didn't exist. No one wanted to come here."

Yet Vegas was the land of big opportunities for a young architect. While Klai worked on the Caesars tower, Juba's first project was a 17-story addition to the Maxim. The fact

that neither was ever taught how to design anything taller than four stories didn't slow them down. ("In school they told us we'd never need to know," Klai says.)

"It was a big thing for us," Juba says. "We not only had jobs but a lot of responsibilities. We got to do restaurants and casino drawings, and that morphed into everything else—sports books, spas ..."

Klai focused on the Caesars expansions and renovations, while Juba did the same for other properties up and down the Strip. Both did resort and casino design work in Atlantic City, Reno and Lake Tahoe, too.

"Tony let our leashes go and go and go till the last minute, before he'd ever pull back," Klai adds. "We had a lot of freedom. It was experience you could never get out of a book."

Certain experiences seemed out of a book, though.

"One time I had to go out in the desert with Frank Sinatra's men," Klai says. The site was south of Tropicana Avenue, and they were scouting out some potential casino property for Frank Sinatra. "I was convinced I was going to get killed, but Tony says, 'Just go, John.' And I did. We were just naïve kids. Whatever anybody asked us to do, we did it."

Marnell was impressed with his young architects from the start. "For a guy from North Dakota, you seem to know a lot about casinos," he once asked Klai. "What did they teach you up there?"

KLAI, AN ACCOUNTING MAJOR IN COLLEGE BEFORE HE SWITCHED to architecture, has always been an ace on the business side. "I had never stepped foot in an architect's office till the day I actually went to work, and there was no real system set up in Tony's office, so I helped establish one."

"Once an accountant, always an accountant," Juba jokes.

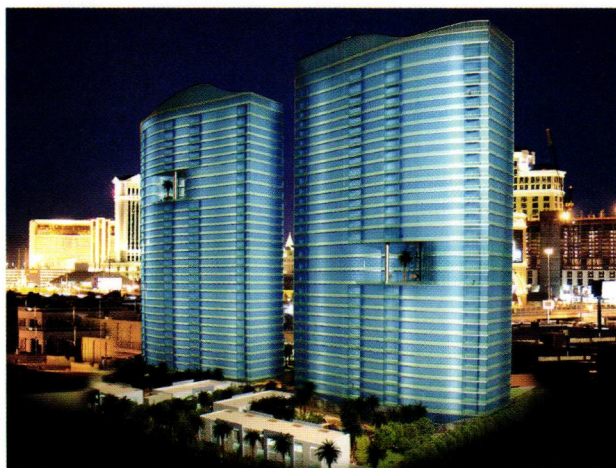
Meantime, Juba made himself an expert on casino design and development. "He still has the best insights on that of anyone I know," Klai says. "He's a great orchestrator. He knows how a casino space works."

Both turned out to be great master planners, with an uncanny ability to handle complicated projects on architectural and personal levels. And by 1990, both were not only vice presidents and equity partners with the company, they had seized the opportunity to be part owners of Marnell's Rio hotel-casino project.

A year after the resort's opening, however, both heard other callings. Juba, 35, was starting a family and wanted out of the grind. Klai, 38, was even more burned out. "It was time to move on, to let architecture go," says Klai, who, however, had considered teaching at UNLV's new School of Architecture. "I really thought I was done for good. I even let my architecture license expire."

They cashed in their equity shares of Marnell Corrao and planned to spend more time at their condo in Colorado, where they would ski in the winter and golf in the summer. Juba actually moved his family up there for a couple of years. Klai stayed in Vegas, doing some consulting work for Marnell, until his next passion came along.

Around the time of his 40th birthday, in 1993, Klai, inspired by working out with a local fitness buff, opened





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a club on Jones and Sahara that featured personal trainers. He called it Z BODÉ. "I thought there was a market for that," he says, "but it was a little before its time. I was sure that was going to be the next wave of my career." He lost patience waiting for the wave to crest, and began to dread each day at the club, especially dealing with all those personal trainers. "I had more stress with that than I ever had with architecture. For the first time in my career I had experienced failure."

Meantime, Juba realized it was too cold to be in Colorado full time, that he didn't want to just golf and ski his life away, and started to long for the camaraderie that he'd had back in Vegas. "I missed the people, the daily interactions with the circle of clients," he says. "It was a very tight-knit group."

The hiatus from architecture ended for both during the climactic bash at a Colorado bar during Juba's 40th birthday-party road trip. Members of the old circle were along, and the old memories came back. "I remember Klai and I were sitting at the bar, having a couple of drinks and smoking cigars, and the thought came up that we should go back into the business."

The time seemed right. Both had explored life on the other side of the fence. And with the news that former Caesars World President Terry Lanni was moving over to the MGM, there was a start-up opportunity.

KLAI JUBA ARCHITECTS OPENED FOR BUSINESS IN THE Z BODÉ building, where Klai was two years into a three-year lease. "We couldn't even afford to take the sign down," he recalls. For a while, it looked like a mixed-use environment: architecture and fitness. "I remember we'd move out a treadmill and move in a desk," says architect John Wald, AIA, who has been with the firm ever since.

Thanks to Klai and Juba's reputation, even after a five-year hiatus, they hit the ground running. The hospitality industry's players were unchanged, and the duo were careful not to step on their former company's turf.

Besides carrying over their Lanni relationship, another early breakthrough came when, one Saturday, the new duo showed up at the temporary offices of the Monte Carlo project—in their shorts and flip-flops—to discuss the Luxor expansion project with a couple of brand-new Circus Circus execs, Bill Richardson and Mike Ensign. It must have gone well, because, according to Juba, it ended with Ensign telling them, "You're doing all our work from now on."

Neither Klai nor Juba had a clue as to the magnitude of those words.

Eventually all of the treadmills gave way to new desks at Z BODÉ, and then the budding firm moved to its current home on Russell Road and Arville Street, from which the Mandalay Bay resort now shimmers in plain sight.

Working with Mandalay, Coast Casinos, MGM Mirage and the Hard Rock, among other major players, Klai Juba has become one of the top casino and hospitality designers in, and out, of Las Vegas, handling more than 75 projects a year. They've been able to give clients what they want, making the transition from the themed resort environment that was popular during the 1990s to the clean, modern look of today that emphasizes entertainment and lifestyle.

"I personally never thought we'd last," Klai says. "I thought we'd do some work, close this place down and go back to our other lives."

"He never told me that," Juba interjects.

"But surprise, surprise," Klai continues, "we were greet-

"Dan's a great orchestrator. He knows how a casino space works."

ed with more opportunities than I'd ever expected, and we've been able to put together a very strong staff."

Part of the glue that has kept the 29-member firm together is a revenue-sharing program that Klai says is very competitive. "These nesteggs have created loyalty—they're not looking for jobs elsewhere. Dan and I were always treated generously and given lots of opportunities [at Marnell Corrao], and we wanted to treat our people even better than we were treated."

Around this point in the conversation, Wald walks into the room—and this is much less coincidence than just good planning. Not only has the longtime associate been in charge of some of the firm's biggest projects—from THEhotel at Mandalay to the Panorama Towers—but he's just been named full partner. Along with three new equity shareholders at the firm, this signals a major change of the guard.

"John is going to perpetuate the legacy of Klai Juba," Juba says by way of introduction.

That and the Vegas-Fargo connection. Not only is Wald a graduate of North Dakota State, so are five other architects onboard. In fact, Wald says, there may be up to 20 of that species now practicing in town.

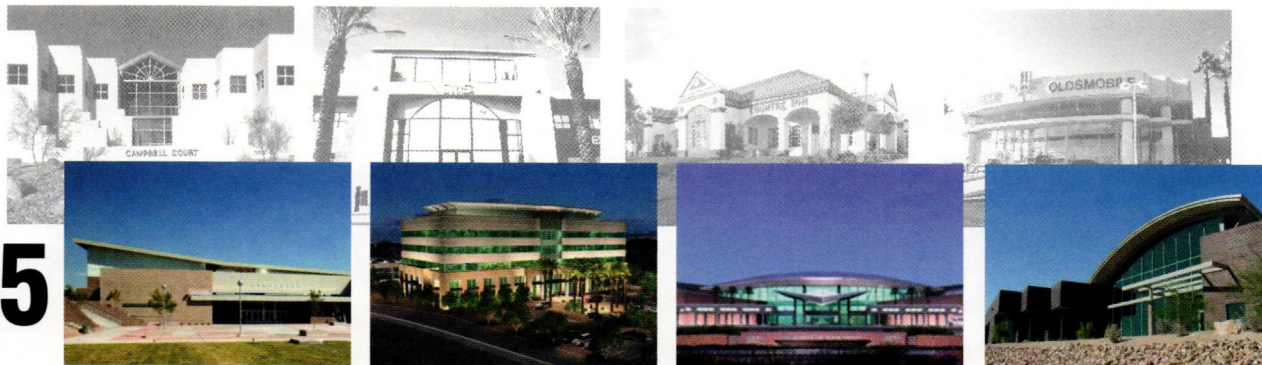
Who said themed architecture is dead in Las Vegas? ■



Two of Klai Juba's signature projects on the Las Vegas Strip: Mandalay Bay and Studio 54 inside the MGM Grand.



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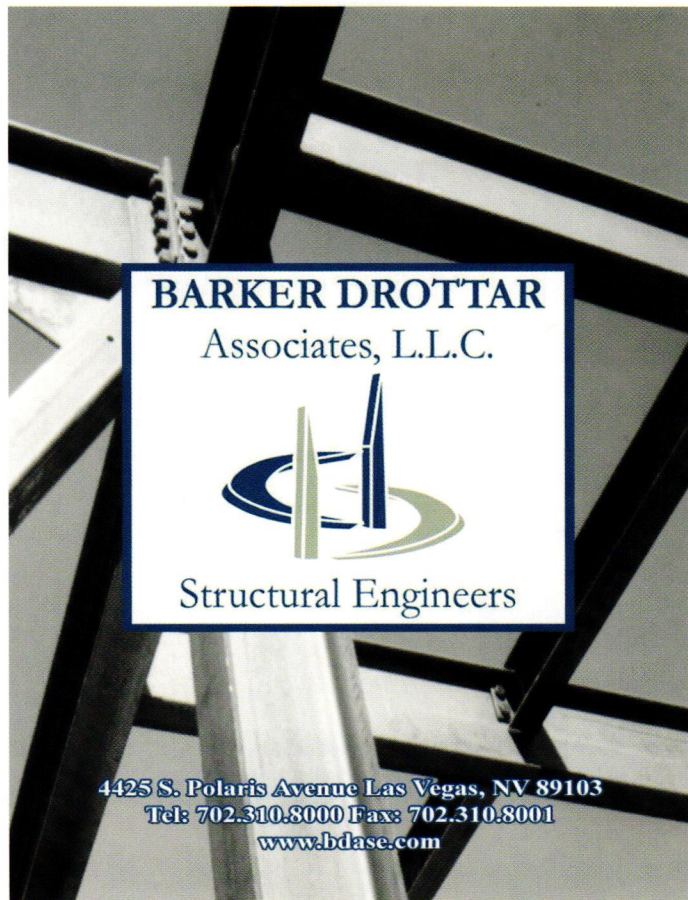
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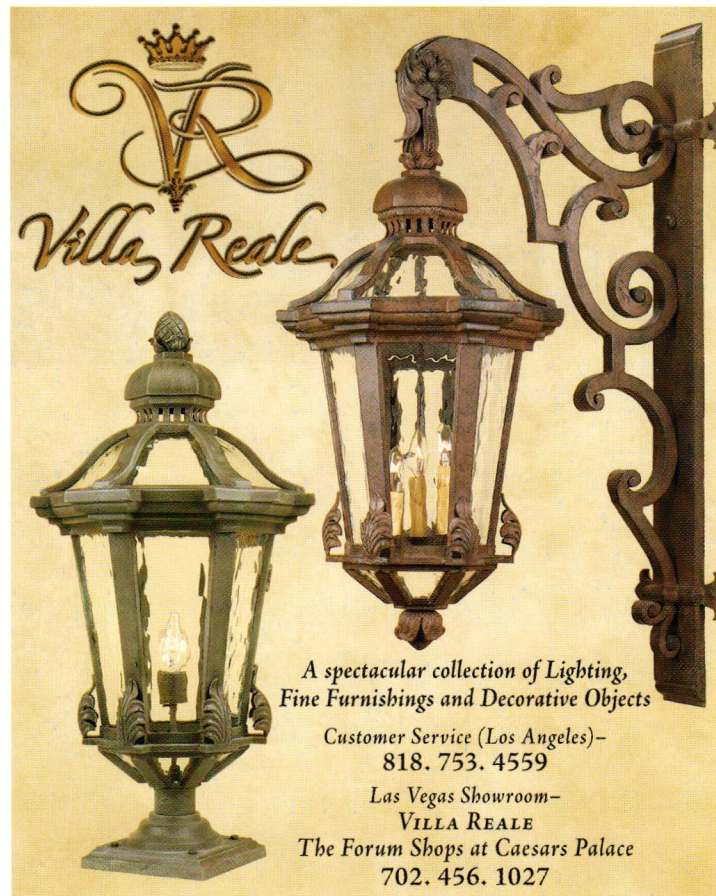


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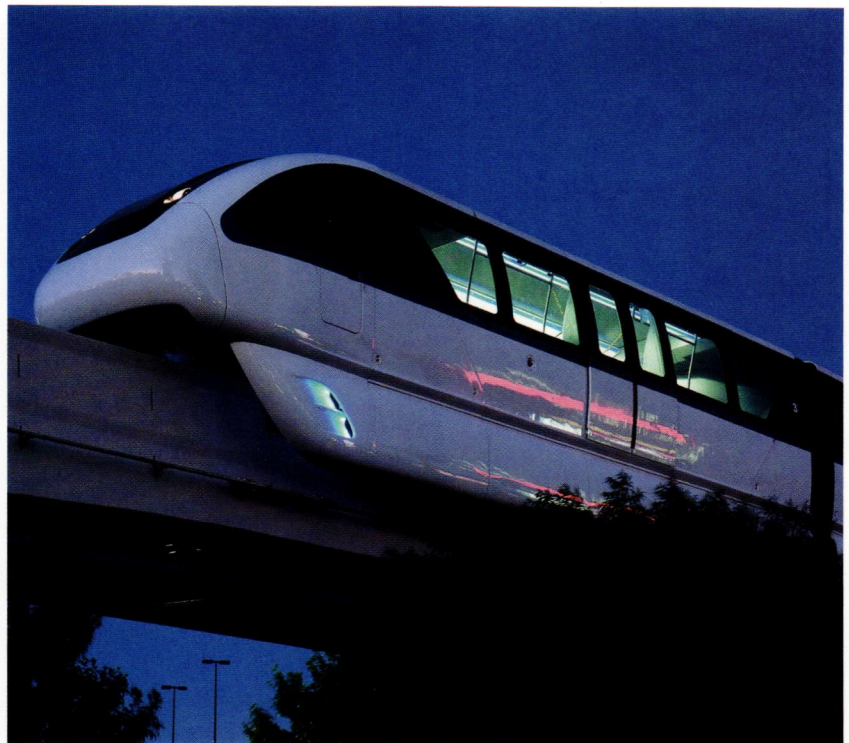
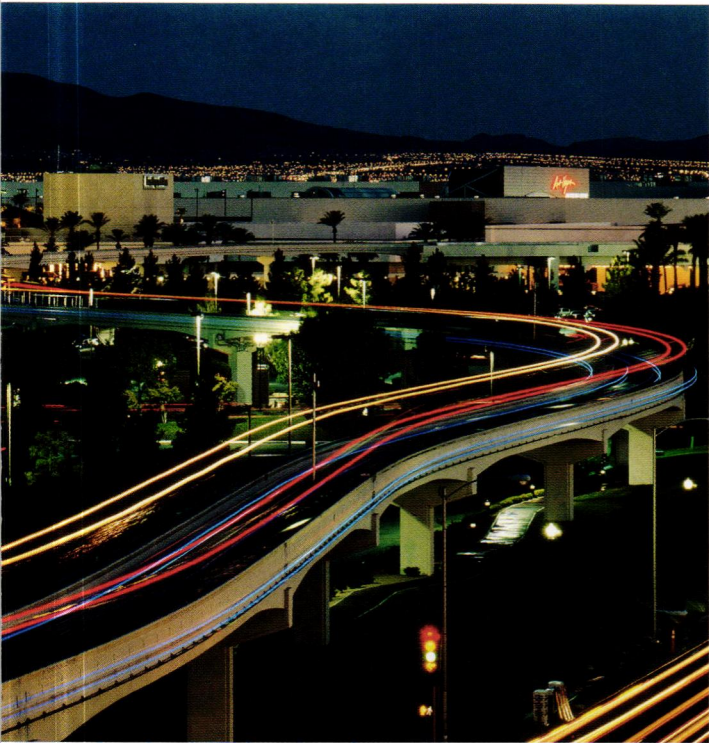
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## The City's Life Line

*America's latest and greatest monorail effort has improved circulation on the Strip, but its true beauty lies ahead—as an artery leading Downtown*

**T**HE MONORAIL, ONCE A SYMBOL OF WHAT LIFE WOULD BE like in the 21st century, is still commonly regarded as the stuff of amusement parks or zoos. This mode of transportation has struggled to share the same seriousness and popularity as other rail systems, such as San Francisco's BART or Chicago's L. Although monorails have enjoyed success abroad, including Malaysia, Korea and Japan, their use in the United States has suffered from a lack of voter support and high construction costs.

In fact, Seattle has had this country's only urban monorail, and it isn't exactly a full-scale transit system. The 1.2-mile-long, two-station line was built by a private developer for the 1962 World's Fair, providing a crucial link between the fairgrounds and downtown amenities. It proved an immediate success, quickly earning back its \$3.5 million construction cost.

Today, the shuttle moves nearly 2.5 million people a year between the Seattle Center and Westlake Mall. While small in scale, the Seattle monorail has transformed its urban core into a welcoming interactive space of open-air markets and cafés, museums and theaters, an energetic cultural area for entertainment, work and living. Its success has prompted construction of a \$1.75 billion, 14-mile extension, scheduled to open in 2009.

But for now, Las Vegas' shiny new \$650 million monorail (now that it's finally operating) is faster, longer and

can transport four times the passengers as Seattle's. The four sleek bullet trains and seven multilevel stations serve tourists from one end of the Strip to the other, annually eliminating 4.4 million automobile trips along the resort corridor, and thus preventing about 135 tons worth of carbon monoxide emissions.

Ultimately, the electric-powered monorail's direct linkage enables easier visitor access and circulation between our ever-growing megaresorts, reducing traffic, slimming herds of visitors on sidewalks and intersection crosswalks, and promoting a renewed sense of vibrancy. The reduced motor vehicle noise and pollution improve street life in one of the world's busiest tourist centers.

The machine itself has a lean muscular profile that quietly shuttles visitors above traffic congestion. A dual-beam elevated guideway sits on reinforced concrete pylons, spread roughly 100 feet apart. The system uses Bombardier's M-VI trains, capable of carrying 5,000 passengers per hour in each direction at speeds up to 50 mph.

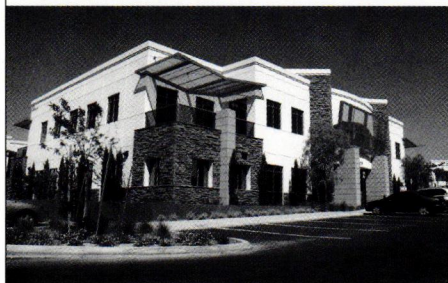
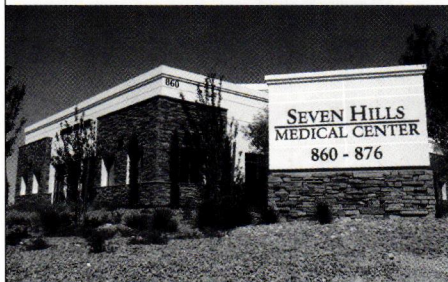
Although similar technology is used at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, the Las Vegas monorail has a more sophisticated fully automated system. It snakes behind eight megaresorts along the Strip in less time than the valet can get your car. And it does it with style and grace, marrying science and art for a fast-moving, scenic ride.

The monorail's glass-and-steel stations form an alto-

Story by  
Tony Illia



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gether different architectural statement. With sweeping rooflines, curved forms and a clean geometry, the stations have a decidedly modern look. They wisely avoid using a theme, enabling them to remain timeless as fashions change. Simple but rugged elegance serves as a sensible contrast to the city's garish megaresorts, giving them a distinct identity. Even the stations' practical elements—such as cantilevered shade canopies and perforated metal paneling for passive ventilation—boost their aesthetic value.

The raised platforms, supported by a network of steel trusses, echo the kinetic shape of the trains themselves, suggesting movement as well as arrival and departure. The structures are constructed from resilient materials in order to withstand the desert's blistering climate as well as the heavy wear and tear from everyday use. The stations attach to the resorts' backdoor, preserving their Strip frontage for new development opportunities.

"The stations are designed for tourists so they had to be clear and easy to navigate," says J.F. Finn, a project architect with San Francisco-based Gensler and Associates, the station designer. "They were an opportunity to create a feeling of dynamism as well as give riders another way to experience the vibrant city."

Of course, he's just talking about the Strip, not the whole urban core. But that may come

next, with the monorail's proposed \$454 million extension, which would unite our two disparate city cultures—the Strip's brash inventiveness and Downtown's historic lineage. Plans call for a 2.3-mile, four-station route with five trains traveling north from the Sahara to the Fremont Street Experience.

Environmental impact studies for the extension have been completed and—unless lack of federal funding freezes the idea—it could be operational as early as 2008, injecting new vitality and purpose into Downtown. Many people are already banking on this urban renaissance, and redevelopment money is pouring in with more than 20,000 new residential units planned or under construction in the Downtown area.

LaPour Partners Inc., a Las Vegas-based developer, is one of the early proselytes. The firm recently completed a \$6 million renovation of the 54-year-old Holsum Bread Factory, a local landmark along Charleston Boulevard near Interstate 15 that had been closed for a few years. The updated building now houses mixed-use live/work spaces with retail stores, showrooms, a café and art galleries. Designed by Stephen Jackson in collaboration with Westar Architectural Services, the 42,300-square-foot modernized warehouse retains much of its original industrial feel with concrete floors and exposed wood truss



ceilings. The building both embraces its roots and fashions a contemporary atmosphere.

"All vibrant cities have the old and the new, and it's important that they coexist," says Jeffrey LaPour, president. "If you can link those disparate elements through public transportation then it becomes a winning combination for everyone."

The monorail could forge a seamless transition between Downtown and the Strip, resulting in a socio-cultural interplay between the two areas that draws visitors and locals as well as employees and business people. Until now, it's been a dream unrealized due to distance and anatomy. But that may soon change as two dynamic enclaves morph into a single visceral experience that's fresh yet familiar, recognizable but unexpected. Each area, as viewed through the monorail, would still retain its heritage and identity, while intellectually engaging the other.

The monorail's extension may also galvanize the city's downtown Arts District, an area bound by Charleston and Oakey Boulevards, and Commerce and Third Streets. Most of its businesses such as the S2 Art Group and the Arts Factory are situated on thin lots with little room to accommodate parking. And while Downtown's composition is ideal for pedestrians, it's difficult for motorists with so many more one-way streets and additional stoplights. But under the monorail's park-

and-ride scenario, people could leave their car at work and travel to the Arts District for a bite to eat or a lunchtime shopping spree with ease of convenience.

The city is aiding this goal by seeking a National Historic District designation for the area. It's a move that would allow property owners to take a 20 percent tax investment credit for building improvements without excessive design constraints or process reviews. The district's structures are characterized by projecting canopies and angled shop fronts, constructed from modern materials reflecting post-World War II architecture.

"Historically, wherever there is a mass-transit stop, you get commercial, residential and mixed-use development clustering around it," says Mayor Oscar Goodman. "The monorail would provide a nexus between the Strip and all of Downtown. It could be monumental in developing the Arts District into an urbane, Manhattanized live-work-play environment that would change the face of the city."

Government officials are considering yet another mass transit project, a 33-mile-long light-rail line that connects parts of the sprawling Las Vegas Valley. The transit system, although still in the early planning stages, would use existing Union Pacific rail tracks to run from southeast Henderson, along the west side of the Strip, and finish in North Las Vegas. If approved, the proposed light-rail project would be completed in 2014.


Meanwhile, the monorail is tomorrow's technology today. And it has the potential to facilitate a more vital dialogue between Downtown and the Strip, a critical discourse that may determine the future of the city's landscape.

While the monorail is sleek and sexy looking, it also mixes technological bravura and urban grit with a strong current of social optimism. It's a radiant instrument capable of reconnecting people with their built and natural environment in a direct and meaningful way, fueling civic pride and allowing for genuine change and urban renewal to occur through a dynamic act of transportation and architecture. ■

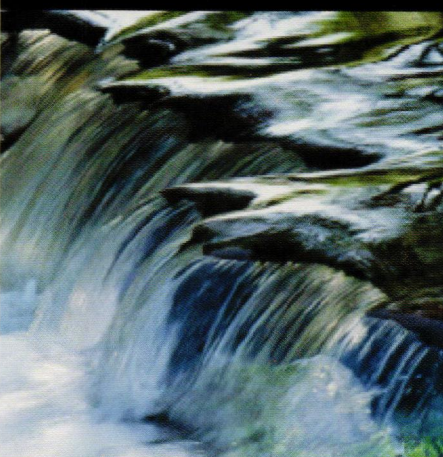
*Tony Illia is a Las Vegas-based writer who covers architecture and business for a variety of publications, including Architectural Record.*



The exterior of the Harrah's-Imperial Palace station.



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Patrick Hanson,  
Eric Neiburh,  
Clemente Cicoria  
and Glen Curry at  
Koval and Harmon.

## Building Blocks

*In developing a unique solution to an urban planning problem, a group of UNLV grad students pave the way for an even bigger idea: 'town and gown' synergy*

**D**RIVE BY THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF HARMON ROAD AND Koval Avenue and you'll see a lifeless, trash-strewn trailer storage site ringed by a battered chain-link fence. But four UNLV architecture students saw something else: the promise of urban renewal. So when they embarked on their fifth-year project last year, they drew up groundbreaking plans for a 12-acre project called "Urban Block," whose features include high-density housing and mixed-use communities.

In the process, they heralded the coming of something even bigger: a closer relationship between the school and the community. Hopes are that it will be like the formal partnership between the city of Tempe and Arizona State University, whereby city councilmen and university officials study how the two can serve each other. Under the plan, Arizona State regularly submits redevelopment proposals to the city.

"The Urban Block model is very similar to what we see happening in Tempe, where 'town and gown' are merging together to develop new strategies for creating opportunities for education, for live-work and to enjoy a neighbor-

hood," says Michael Kroelinger, AIA, director of the UNLV School of Architecture.

Such synergy is already apparent in the planned Midtown UNLV project on Maryland Parkway around the school's Harmon entrance, where public-private partnerships would yield a mixed-use village with shopping, entertainment and housing. UNLV officials and donors conceived the idea to revitalize the area in concert with the school's development master plan. But Urban Block represents the first time UNLV design students have come together to propose a project of such scope.

"We've always seen high-quality presentations from our students, but what we have here is a mega-project—not in the scale of the project, but in the scale of work the students tackled in addressing the issues and opportunities for that site," Kroelinger says. "We had a team situation where a group of students worked closely with the faculty to understand the possibilities for this type of project in Las Vegas, where mixed-use projects are what we need."

Managing the Harmon-Koval site's dimension was key to uncovering those possibilities. In their presentation, the

Story by  
Jennifer Robison

Photo by  
Aaron Mayes



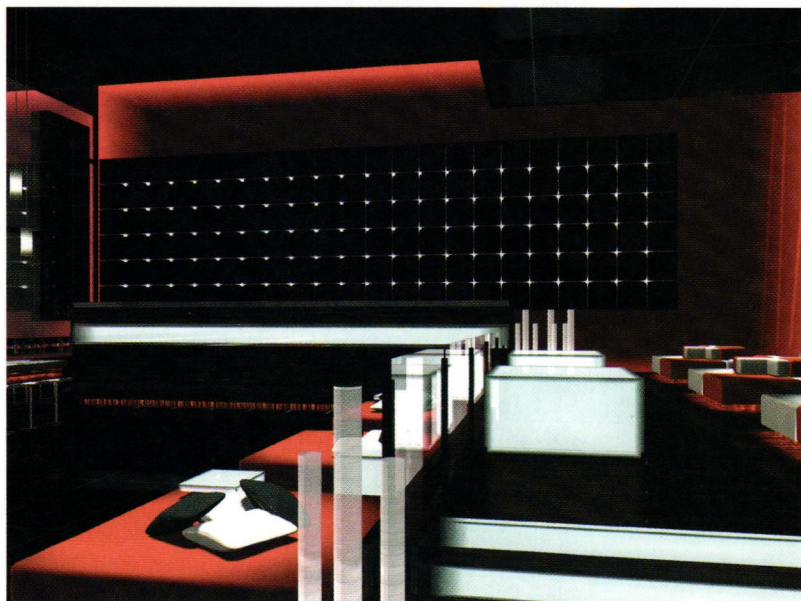


UNLV's Urban Block team mixed a variety of uses, including shopping (above) and nightclubbing (below), for their influential fifth-year project.

students (who call their collaboration "CPEG," for the first initials of their names) noted that the average city block on and around the Las Vegas Strip is 14.3 acres—an alienating mass when compared with grids in more vibrant urban areas such as Manhattan, where city blocks measure less than two acres. The Strip area's block design has given rise to "voids created by the inappropriate scale" of megaresorts, the students believe.

CPEG's plans address the problem by breaking the parcel into eight smaller blocks with about 20 buildings. The 1.3 million square feet of space would include 407 loft homes, 16 restaurants and bars, and 58,000 square feet of retail space. The objective: to create a pedestrian friendly environment that would promote more sophisticated urban growth in neighboring areas. Outdoor restaurant patios, loft balconies, bar entrances—all would interact with the urban streetscape. A two-level parking garage would be stashed underground, removing the automobile even further from the tapestry of the community's daily life. Urban Block's design also boasts a housing density of 36 units per acre (compared with about six units per acre in a standard suburban Vegas subdivision). It's all about fostering a neighborhood atmosphere with neighbors—you know, people who actually interact.

"We wanted to create more density in the urban fabric,"



says Patrick Hanson, now a 3D graphic artist with Paul Steelman Design Group. "We didn't want gigantic buildings without relation to human scale. We wanted an environment people could actually walk around in."

Initially tasked with developing plans individually for an 80,000-square-foot building, the four partners decided to combine efforts and foster a bigger idea. "Being in the studio environment, we tended to spend a lot of time together in and out of class," says Glen Curry, also a 3D graphic artist at Steelman Design Group. "[My partners] were peers who were actually my friends, and we have similar likes and

dislikes in design. We began to talk about our four separate projects, and we decided that if we came together, we could drive a lot deeper into an urban-scale project than we could as individuals."

CPEG opted for the Harmon-Koval intersection because it serves as a nexus of the Strip, UNLV and the Hard Rock Hotel. "It has the crowd we wanted to attract—a young, hip, trendy kind of crowd," says Eric Niebuhr, a designer with HCA Architects. That target audience would ideally have jobs on the Strip, or even in the nightclubs and bars within Urban Block. "We saw this project as a place where people our age could actually live, work and play, and not have to worry about transportation," says Clemente Cicoria, who, like his partners, is in his mid-20s. "At night, the streets come alive with people rather than cars."

Such progressive ideas demand progressive design. Though the partners hesitate to pigeonhole their project into a specific aesthetic, they all acknowledge Urban Block has a decidedly modernist flavor, with clean, industrial lines. The finishing materials would include raw concrete, metal, steel and glass. And no design flourish is just a flourish: Shade structures are not mere ornamentation but buffers against the summer sun; abundant courtyards and exterior corridors, studded with desert friendly plants, don't merely look nice, but also provide cooling drafts.

They also toyed with the very conventions of traditional urban design—for example, placing some lofts on the ground floor with retail and office space upstairs. Public areas such as restaurants and nightclubs would have doors propped open onto a central area.

"If you were walking along the [Urban Block] streets, you'd experience all the senses," Niebuhr says. "The expressive architecture and the lights would draw you, but you'd also hear the people in the nightclubs, you'd experience the restaurants, you'd hear the bands playing. It's a tight environment where you can experience an urban feel."

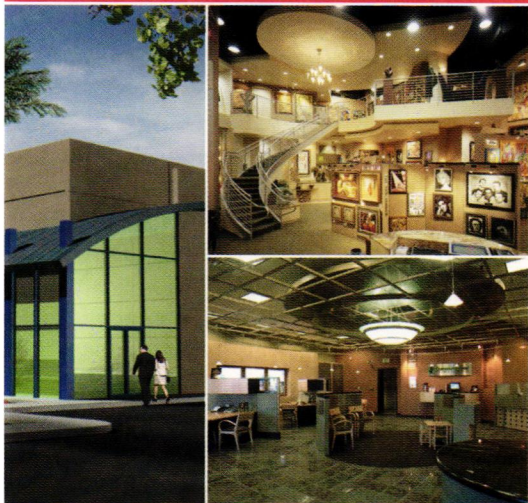
Considering that CPEG began plotting their project in September 2003, their ideas seem remarkably prescient. Michael Alcorn, AIA, an associate professor in the School of Architecture, says the plans are mirrored in the latest big idea on the Strip: MGM Mirage's 66-acre, 8,000-room Project CityCenter, unveiled in November. "It's the way things will start to be developed in Las Vegas," he says.

Though it will likely never be built, Cicoria, a designer at assemblageSTUDIO, believes Urban Block can improve on existing mixed-use concepts planned or under way in the Valley. "The aesthetics of a lot of these places almost feel like movie sets. There's no real interaction with the street and the people who live in these areas. A lot of developers are trying these grandiose plans, but we wanted to establish a neighborhood where people who don't make millions of dollars could live."

Alcorn notes that CPEG's Urban Block "created quite the buzz" in the school. But the project has done more than simply spur conversation. The schematic—and the alliance that conceived it—is also changing the way students operate. Of the 12 students in their fifth-year class, the members of



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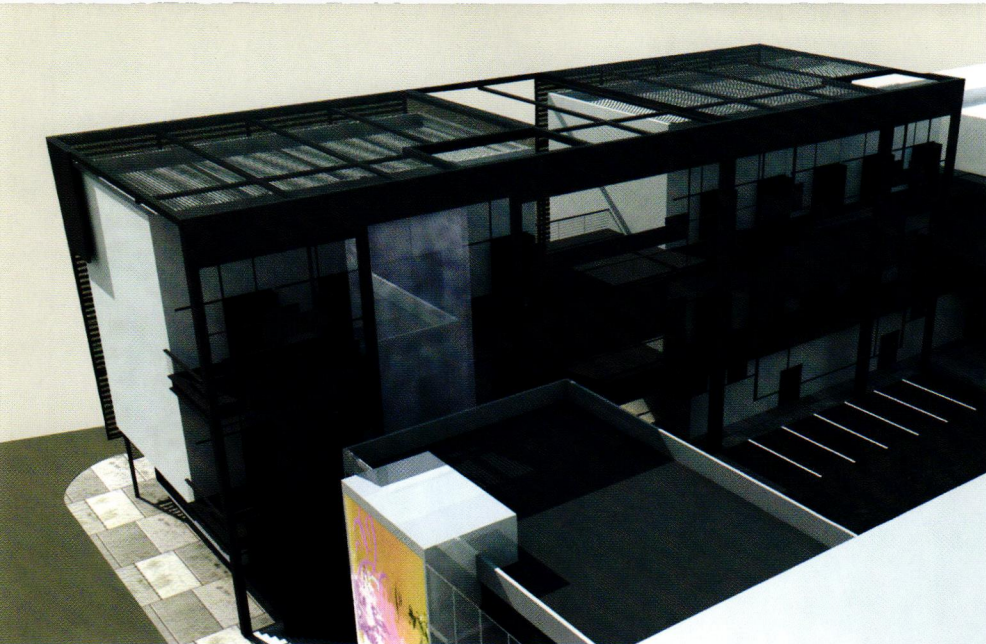
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Urban Block's design boasts 36 housing units per acre, which is a lot denser than the six units per acre in a typical Vegas suburb.

CPEG were the only four who worked together. The remainder submitted solo concepts.

"Most graduate students like to work individually, but professionally, architecture is generally a collaborative effort," Alcorn says. "[The partners in CPEG] were able to circumvent their egos and work together as a group. It taught other students in the school that collaborative efforts can be greater than individual efforts. It's led to people working together to see if they can achieve more in partnership than working by themselves."

Already, students in this year's graduate class have formed two project groups.

"We hope our project will encourage other students to understand they can accomplish a lot more together than they will by themselves," Curry says. "That should help improve not only the projects coming out of UNLV but the students as well."

CPEG's efforts could pay even bigger dividends for the School of Architecture this spring. The college is up for accreditation—after first conferring accreditation in 1997 for five years, the National Architecture Accrediting Board renewed accreditation in 2002 for just three years. A team from the board visited in March to scope out the school's facilities and funding. But they also assessed the school on 34 criteria for judging students' work. "[CPEG's Urban Block] is going to make a very nice display," Alcorn says. "It raised the bar for the level of student performance."

And a positive future for the School of Architecture will enable it to fulfill what Kroelinger believes is its true mission: actively improving the community around it.

"This work reinforces the importance of this school being thoroughly engaged with the Las Vegas community. It's extremely important for our goals that we be on the leading edge in addressing design and planning issues for the community. We need to lead the community and not just use it as a lab. This project reinforces that we are, and will continue to be, engaged in the community in this way." ■



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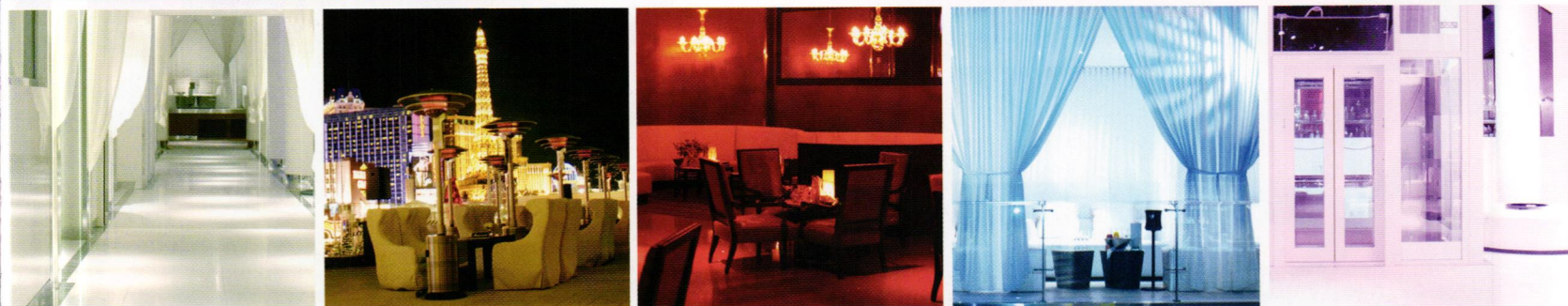
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# THE NEW HORIZON

Are we smartly and attractively  
creating Manhattan West  
or is our head in the clouds?  
Exploring the ramifications of  
the high-rise revolution

They call it "Panorama," and they mean it. At the sales center for the condominium towers that will rise just west of Interstate 15 between Tropicana Avenue and Flamingo Road, the climax of a visual pitch that includes two six-foot, sea-blue models is a floor-to-ceiling window view of the Las Vegas Valley. The span of familiar landmarks, mountains and hotel-casinos spools past on a scrolling sheet like a player-piano roll. Any frozen moment could be your view.

The only complication is that you have to imagine, intruding upon this landscape, the vantage points of thousands of others, perched in their prospective towers, looking back at you.

By various estimates, anywhere from 50 to 80 residential towers, ranging up to 73 stories, could sprout throughout the Valley over the next few years, in what some are calling "the Manhattanization of Las Vegas." The trend traces to a nexus of social and financial factors: the Valley's expanding

By Chuck Twardy  
Illustration by Craig LaRotonda



The Art Deco-inspired Liberty hopes to be the centerpiece of north Strip living.



Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara Avenue. "What you've seen so far has only been the precursor."

But that herald arrives with as many concerns as projects. New ways to pack more people into the Valley mean more strain on resources and additional air pollution. The increased density of residential towers will put more cars on a highway network already struggling to keep up with growth, and new right-of-ways for transit are scarce, especially along the Strip. And as the median new-home price pushes past \$275,000, the prospects for affordable housing dim while housing for the wealthy expands.

Almost as important is the issue of what our urban landscape will look like in another decade. It might seem a moot point in a town whose skyline comprises crenelated castle walls, mansard roofs and faux-Roman pediments. But as the world's playground coalesces into a real city, architects in particular are concerned that it elaborate an identity, particularly one whose buildings reflect, and respect, its presence in a harsh desert.

"A community does have an opportunity to shape its own skyline if it chooses to do that," says Craig Galati, AIA, principal with Lucchesi Galati Architects. The former chair of the Las Vegas Planning Commission monitored the seeding of what he calls a "renaissance" Downtown, including a number of medium-size loft and condominium towers. But he is concerned that as the trend spreads, highly reflective glass curtain walls—both hazardous to drivers and energy-inefficient in the sun-drenched desert—will pop up all over the place.

This is a possibility if nothing were done, says architect Chuck Kubat, AIA, a planning and development-services consultant. "We have an opportunity to affect the eventual form of the Valley visually." When he was vice president for planning and design at the Howard Hughes Corporation, Kubat saw how careful planning could unify disparate developments in Summerlin. More recently, he was named to a "stakeholders group" formed by Clark County to study the tower trend and make recommendations to planners.

"It is something of broader interest than any one jurisdic-

"This town is going to change **beyond** belief."

prosperity, the city's growing popularity among both retiring baby boomers and party-hearty Gen-X'ers, and the rise in land prices as the metropolis creeps up the foothills of the enclosing mountains.

Most observers in real estate, planning and architecture agree that the probable number of finished projects will be smaller, but even half of the low end of the range—25 towers—would mean a significant metamorphosis of the shape-shifting Sin-Cityscape.

"This town is going to change beyond belief," says Australian developer Victor Altomare, who plans to build, with partner Joseph Di Mauro, the 73-story Summit, a combination of condominium and condo-hotel units with ground-level retail at

tion," Kubat says. "What the county's doing will perhaps offer up a way of thinking about this topic that the other jurisdictions might find useful."

The stakeholders group's discussions complemented the county's continuing effort to manage growth, which includes a task force studying that larger issue. More directly, those discussions fed into the drafting of an ordinance (approved by the county commission in January) that encourages more mixed-use developments in the county.

The ordinance sets four "tiers" of high-rise compatibility. Along the Strip, heights would be unlimited. In suburban "nodal" areas, around key traffic intersections and interchanges, heights would be limited to 100 feet, or 200 feet with a "use



permit" waiver from the commission. Less-intense "transition" nodes would have a 50-foot limit (100 with a use permit), and elsewhere heights would be kept under 50 feet.

Context would be the key to any project's approval, with no specific design restrictions or standards, according to county planners.

"My hope is that there would be an evolving consciousness that we are building in the desert," says Kubat. "It's not real easy to define that in a standard."

Kubat holds that design standards eliminate the extremes, both the design unsuitable for desert habitation and the most creative solutions to harsh sunlight and energy challenges.

The early evidence suggests that the Valley's new towers are more concerned with views than environment and that they reflect pleasant but undistinguished design traits from cities known for trendy residential towers. Observers point to two projects that helped launch the trend: Park Towers, two 19-story condominium towers built by Irwin Molasky at Flamingo Road and Howard Hughes Parkway; and Turnberry Place on Paradise Road south of Sahara, whose developer, Turnberry Associates, recently completed a third 40-story tower on the site. Both are attractive but unremarkable, the latter in particular very much similar to projects Turnberry has built in its home base, Miami.

"Stampitecture" is what Robert Fielden, FAIA, of RAFI calls buildings designed by out-of-state architects and whose drawings are stamped by local firms hired for the purpose.

So far, his former firm, JMA Architecture Studios, is among the few to put a figurative stamp on high-rise designs in the Valley. The firm got a jump on the movement by working on Park Towers, and it is now involved in more than 20 high-rise projects in the Valley—most notably as design architect for Altomare's the Summit.

"It's intended to be a gateway building for the City of Las Vegas," says JMA Principal Thomas Schoeman, AIA. The sloping, cylindrical form will be entirely sheathed in silver-toned glass. "You're selling views," he says. But Schoeman also calls the Summit "a state-of-the-art building ... a truly high-tech statement for Nevada."

The first two 300-condo towers of Panorama will also be glass-curtained in order to "take incredible advantage of a most beautiful landscape horizon [and an] incredible middle ground, like a Renaissance painting," says Wolfram Putz, one of the partners of Graft Architects, the Los Angeles- and

Berlin-based architecture firm that is designing the project with Klai Juba Architects, a local firm. Graft has become more engaged as the project has advanced, but Putz calls working with Klai Juba "a communal effort."

Panorama is being built by Sasson/Hallier Development. Andrew Sasson is a restaurant and nightclub entrepreneur for whom Graft designed FIX restaurant at Bellagio. Graft's design philosophy holds that architecture helps establish identity in a world of nomads, and Putz argues that the Panorama towers will do just that, by "adding onto and continuing the vernacular of Las Vegas."

The undulant, aqua towers with recessed terraces and wavy rooflines are "honestly modern," says Putz, yet "joyous" and "democratic" without kitsch. They will suit Las Vegas but also speak to the Europeans and Asians they are likely to attract as full- or part-time residents. The "sky garden" cut through each building at different levels "creates another destination within the tower," Putz says, as well as a trademark identity. But it also recapitulates the "sky court" of Arquitectonica's 1982 Atlantis condominiums in—where else?—Miami.

If Panorama hopes to attract the club-scene demographic, it will have some competition from the Hard Rock Hotel, whose chief, Peter Morton, plans to build four condo-hotel towers on 24 acres adjacent to the hotel. He has enlisted Richard Meier & Partners to design the project, which will include restaurants, shops and clubs. And Hard Rock is hardly the only hotel-casino exploiting the condo-tower boom. Turnberry is developing the Residences at MGM Grand, with one 38-story condo tower sold out while under construction and two others planned.

These projects represent a new trend in Las Vegas real

The Stratosphere will still stand tallest after the first high-rise wave, but the new Summit will be a close second.





estate: the condo-hotel. When the owners are not in residence, the units are booked as apartment-like hotel suites. The residents do not have to pass through a casino, but can get to one easily, onsite or down the street. "You bring your shoes and your toothbrush and you're ready to go," says broker David Atwell of Resort Properties of America. He says the trend is here to stay: "Let's face it, Vegas has entered into a new horizon of economic acceptability."

For some, however, the horizon hides some clouds. Fielden, for instance, sees it as a probability that any kind of recession will leave the Valley burdened with a number of hulking, vacant towers, as second- and third-home owners will ditch their condos. "Developers don't think about the long haul because they're going to sell it and get out," Fielden says.

"They'll be empty from the beginning," says Altomare, acknowledging that many strictly condo units will go unused much of the time—for instance, the 150 units atop the Summit. The 132 condo units of his second project in the city, the 20-story Liberty Towers, just north of the Summit on Las Vegas Boulevard, could be unused a large part of the time.

But these projects offer a tradeoff in street-level vitality. "I have a problem with enclaves," says Altomare, referring to gated residential towers. "We're not seeking to create these dead-air places." Instead, Liberty will have a bistro in its base, and the Summit will offer shops and restaurants in its first three floors. Panorama also has a ground-level retail component, including a celebrity-chef "canteen."

Even if most of their residents are not home, many of

In December, Councilman Lawrence Weekly led a council defeat for Ambling Development Company's three-tower proposal for his district, saying he had been "sickened" that an employee in Van Corp's department had assured the developer of approval before Weekly knew about it. Hastily organized area residents spoke resoundingly against the towers, citing both design incompatibility and traffic woes. The Atlanta-based developer sank more than \$2 million into land and early plans, and the reputedly over-optimistic employee, Economic Development Manager Doug Lein, resigned.

Traffic concerns are significant. The monorail project might eventually extend from the Strip into Downtown, and could prove a crucial service for both locals and residents of new condo towers. Ingrid Riesman, spokeswoman for the Regional Transportation Commission, says the RTC has no specific response to the high-rise onset, but increased density will serve to make transit options more viable. More riders mean more revenue, which means increased service, whatever the transit option.

The Strip bus route will soon convert to double-decker buses to increase capacity. No additional right-of-way can be found along the Strip to build any type of "fixed-guideway" transit, Riesman says.

Architect Galati, however, would like to see transit guiding development, with a mix of uses, which could include high-rise residential aggregating around transit stops. "What I'm hoping is that there will be some kind of transportation option

## "Face it, Vegas has entered into a new horizon."

the high-rise projects at least offer something to the streets they occupy. In its 2000 Downtown Centennial Plan, the city eliminated height restrictions to encourage high-rises and it stipulated that in most areas retail or commercial uses should occupy street-level spaces in those buildings.

"We're still sticking to our values," says Steve Van Corp, redevelopment manager for the city's Office of Business Development. Those values include "a walkable urban environment." Around the edges of Downtown, some projects might be more "hybrid," he says, meaning a private or gated entrance but some form of street retail attached.

The city alone is tracking some 20,000 potential housing units in high-rises of various sizes, to be built by developers from all over, Van Corp says. "The market's soft around the country, so they're all pouring in here."

It hasn't hurt, either, that the city has been actively promoting its laissez-faire policies, which include few restrictions and a fast-track permitting process managed by OBD. Altomare says he and Di Mauro were attracted by Mayor Oscar Goodman's policies with regard to development. In return for the fast-track treatment, Altomare says the city is getting infrastructure upgrades, including a one-mile sewer line.

But the city's track might have been a little too slick.

that could be the binder," he says. "Multinoded development connected by freeways—that's not a logical next step."

What impact condo towers will have on Valley traffic remains to be seen, especially if most high-rise residents are out-of-towners. It could be that most people seek no more than an address in a state without an income tax, a place to stay and play a few weeks a year, or a perk for clients or employees.

Galati sees the World Market Center, which will hold its first home furnishings exposition in July, increasing demand for Downtown condos to house retailers while in town. Early evidence from sales indicates a 70/30 pattern: Downtown, about 70 percent of units will be occupied by locals, whereas on the Strip, only 30 percent will be occupied by locals. The marketing for Strip condos and condo-hotel units is worldwide. Altomare and DiMauro, for instance, have an office in Hong Kong. "I don't think we've even tapped the Asian market yet," Atwell says.

With unit prices ranging from \$350,000 up to several million dollars at Panorama, or roughly \$1,000 per square foot at the Summit, the high-rise trend is clearly for the affluent. Atwell notes that the traditional "whales" of the casino world tend to get everything for free, and so are not



Sky Las Vegas  
is where the  
Miami aesthetic  
(Desjardins Design  
Group) meets Las  
Vegas (Klai Juba  
Architects).



a market for condos or condo-hotels. He considers that market "middle-upper class."

He also sees it as relatively self-contained, not having much impact on local housing affordability. But others worry that the high-rise trend will only make housing less affordable for locals. "What do we do for workforce housing?" Fielden asks, noting that even school principals are turning down jobs because they cannot afford to live in the Valley.

"Living in a home is going to be a privilege in the Valley," Altomare admits.

Both he and Atwell point to the trend of developers converting apartment complexes into condos, and say this is where market-rate affordable housing will be found henceforth.

Van Corp isn't so sure things are all that bad. Five years ago, he notes, people complained that Downtown was awash in low-cost housing. In the city, at least, he sees a healthy mix of high-rises offering condos for varied income-levels, but he adds that affordability is an issue on the city's radar screen. He notes that Mayor Goodman has talked about inclusionary zoning—a requirement that developers build affordable housing when they build other projects.

But Fielden notes that when Henderson attempted to place an affordable-housing restriction on a Bureau of Land Management sale last spring, the effort fell apart. He doubts any such effort will succeed in the Valley.

Others argue that the benefits of the high-rise trend outweigh the risks. Altomare points to the jobs his Summit and Liberty projects will create, both in construction and operation. His and other condo and condo-hotel towers will bring people to Las Vegas from around the world in ever greater numbers, making it both more successful and more cosmopolitan.

"I think you're seeing Vegas becoming positioned to become a globally recognized city," Van Corp says.

And the sky appears to be the limit, literally and figuratively. Altomare notes that the major resort corporations in Las Vegas continue to invest heavily here—he points to MGM Mirage's recently unveiled Project CityCenter, including hotels and condo towers, master-planned by New York's Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut and Kuhn Architects for the Boardwalk Casino property.

"I don't see any end to it," Atwell believes. About the only threat to the spiral, he says, would be a major terrorist attack—a prospect no one in Las Vegas wants to consider.

But Fielden, who has seen various kinds of high-rise booms wither in other cities, from Denver to Honolulu, does consider it. "There are all kinds of new cloud covers that we never had back in the 1970s," he says.

For now, though, the clouds are the Valley's target. ■

*Chuck Twardy, a steady contributor to Architecture Las Vegas, is a local art and design critic who also writes for Metropolis magazine.*



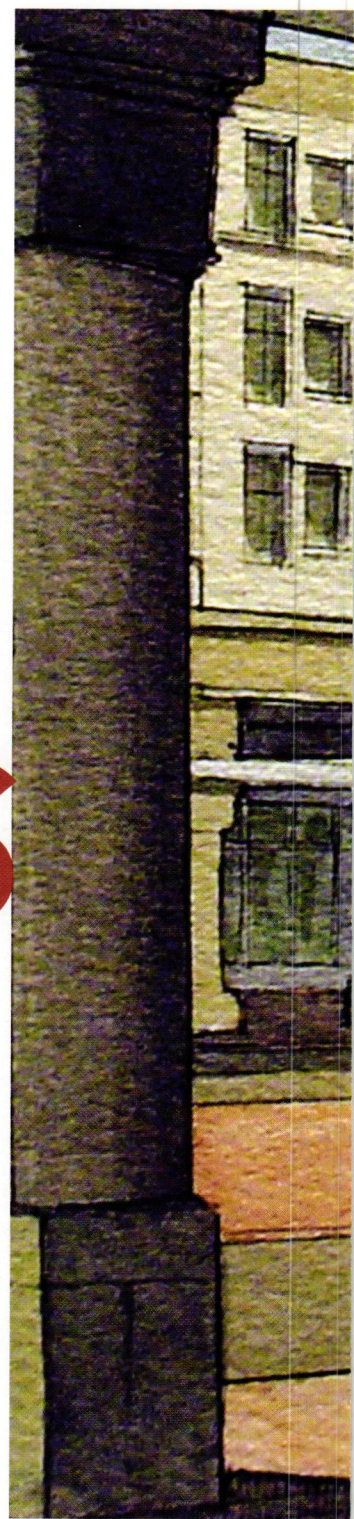
# Villages vs. ZOOM burgs

**T**he road to sprawl is paved with good intentions, among them the desire of young couples to purchase their own homes. That usually translates into the demand for houses with enough bedrooms and large yards in which to raise kids, all on a constrained budget. Add these needs to an increasing population, let it brew in an enclosed space—let's say the Las Vegas Valley—and you have created a petri dish for disaster.

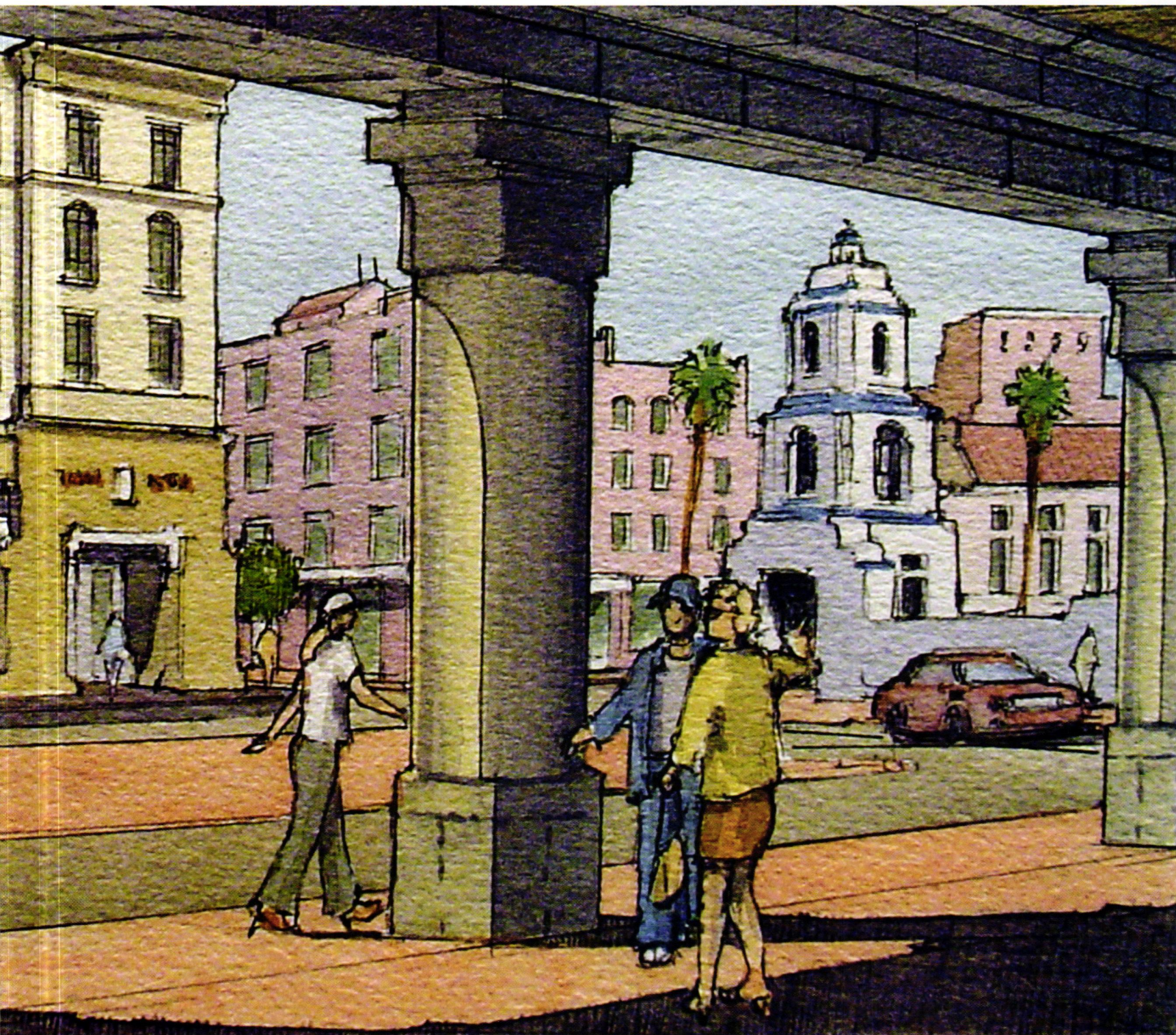
Sprawl is the uncontrolled metastasizing of suburbia, the low-density spread of housing developments just far enough from work and shopping that it forces people to depend on automobiles. Its road designs favor cul-de-sacs that feed into busy streets that are hostile to pedestrians and which, in turn, feed into the same few arterials, a virtual choke-chain that couldn't be better designed to pump hydrocarbons into the air.

Las Vegas adds 8,000 residents per month, and the growth of the city shows no sign of slowing. The Valley is running out of room for new arrivals, and as a result, land and housing prices have been escalating rapidly. Las Vegas remains a favored alternative to the more expensive real estate of Southern California, however, and it has a variety of jobs to offer. It remains a magnet

By William L. Fox

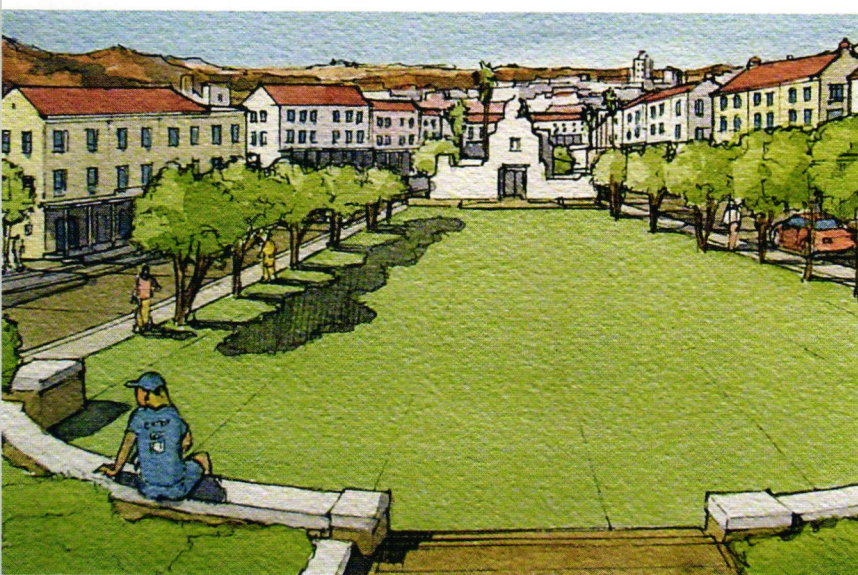
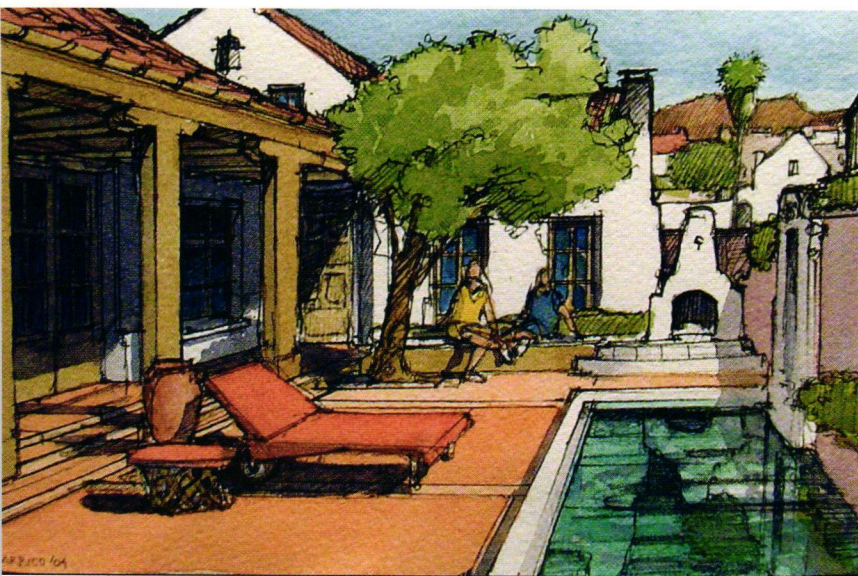






***Does New Urbanism have a chance in a valley that's all about sprawl?  
One development in Henderson is banking on it***





PREVIOUS PAGE: Arcades along storefronts in Focus' Henderson development will emphasize pedestrian over vehicular traffic. THIS PAGE: Other New Urbanism traits in that village include small back yards to encourage neighbor interaction and a town center that expresses the idea of shared space.

for displaced blue-collar workers, immigrants and young families—not to mention the retirees who tend to favor the state's tax policies. The precipitous provision of housing stock in response has produced a new word in the national design lexicon: zoomburg, or a suburb that explodes seemingly overnight.

The remaining open spaces in the Valley are split between 82,000 privately owned acres and 50,000 acres maintained by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The latter are slated for auction within a few years, but developers are already feeling pinched for room. The solution being sought by some homebuilders is to leapfrog outward to places such as Logandale, Pahrump, south to Primm, north toward Amargosa Valley and even across the border into northern Arizona, where it'll "only" be a 45-minute commute to Vegas after the dam bypass is completed. In doing so, they are only exacerbating the sprawl.

Ten years ago, the renowned historian Mike Davis took Las Vegas to

task for irresponsible expansion in his oft-reprinted essay "Las Vegas Against Nature" (from the book *Dead Cities*, The New Press, 2002), a deliberate pun on John McPhee's piece "Los Angeles Against the Mountains." Both were screeds exposing the folly of unconstrained growth in the face of limited resources in the arid West. Davis noted that the two cities depended on cheap water, power and land, and that the ever-expanding waistline of their suburbs led to an increasing dependence on automobiles, lack of public amenities and mass transit, and a completely unsustainable and unhealthy growth pattern. He suggested that New Urbanism, a design movement prioritizing environmental and social equity designs, could offer a way out of the environmental impasse.

The "town-making fundamentals" of New Urbanism are derived from American 19th-century villages. Their master plans put commercial activity in the center of a gridded street scheme, but locate public squares and civic buildings in neighborhoods in order to provide local focus. A unified architectural style is applied to houses of varying sizes, which, coupled with the location of apartments above businesses and small rental properties built behind single-family dwellings, encourages affordable housing. Streets and layout are scaled so that a pedestrian can walk within five minutes from the edge of a neighborhood to its center—thus eliminating the need to drive to the convenience store or school.

New Urbanism makes multiple neighborhoods the basic unit of city-building, takes local topography into account and seeks integration with existing metropolitan areas. It preserves open green areas by increasing the density of actual living space and slows down traffic with narrower streets. Curbside parking spaces create a buffer between pedestrian and automobile, and garages are located off to one side or in back along alleyways.

It's taken some years for the idea to gain traction in Las Vegas, and companies such as Carina Homes, the largest traditional homebuilder in the Valley, has been erecting small neighborhoods of 30 to 60 acres around commons since the late 1990s. Recently they've brought on board San Francisco's Peter Calthorpe, one of the founders of New Urbanism, to consult on their Centennial Springs and St. Rose Village developments, which are mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly communities.

But the movement isn't just about designing quaint villages with boutique shops next to a park with a gazebo; it's about changing public perception, living habits and the actual infrastructure of urban life. And that's what is being tackled at a much deeper and larger scale by the Focus Property Group, which engaged the services of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) to design a New Urbanism village in Henderson.

Focus put together a consortium of seven builders, then held a five-day public charette in Henderson that was led by DPZ's Andres Duany, another of New Urbanism's founders. The investment in an open planning process resulted in a plan to build 12,000 homes for 26,000 people on 1,940 acres purchased at a BLM auction. That's almost twice the density found in the nearby upscale Anthem development, which doesn't always make for an easy sell. It's ironic that, although New Urbanism is rooted in the design principles of an earlier century, Americans have historically preferred sprawl.

Thomas Jefferson—a surveyor before he became president—decided early in the 19th century that America should be parceled out on a national grid of nesting squares so that every citizen-farmer could have his own plot of land. Ever since then we've taken some version of that egalitarian concept as a birthright, a notion made even more attractive with the advent of the industrial age, which transformed cities into pol-



luted manufacturing centers. By 1900, the owners of transit companies in major cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago were developing residential communities outside the urban boundary, touting the single-family ownership of a country cottage as a healthy alternative to living in the city and raising children there.

If we couldn't afford to buy the farm that Jefferson envisioned each voter cultivating, then we could at least have a stand-alone house with a lawn and back yard. And thus was suburbia born, the split between residential and business communities made possible by a peculiarly American dynamic: plenty of cheap land, mechanized transportation and eventually a tax code that allowed homeowners to deduct property taxes and mortgage interest from their incomes. At the same time, the increasing industrialization of the cities forced architects out of the planning process, and urban design became an engineering proposition devoted to the needs of the automobile, not people.

The postwar baby boom fueled a population explosion that coincided with a rising affluence in the middle class. Bill Levitt, who had been

Network (SGN), a coalition promoting developments with walkable neighborhoods. This was even briefly a campaign issue for Al Gore during the 2000 presidential race. The SGN's goals were derived in large part from the thinking of Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, two architects who founded DPZ in 1980.

When you ask John Ritter, the CEO of Focus, how he came to believe in New Urbanism, he speaks with passion and clarity. "We were looking for solutions to three major problems in Las Vegas. The first is affordability. The lack of available land here means a run-up in prices. That's most easily addressed by increasing density—but you have to do it in a way that's aesthetically pleasing. The second is water. Most of the water use in Las Vegas is for residential landscaping, and the majority of water wasted is on lawns. By putting the garages in back and pushing the front of the house to the street, you make the front yard smaller and cut down on watering.

"The third issue is social isolation. After World War II we fell out of love with our neighbors and in love with our cars. You drive up to your

**"We want a community without walls that emphasizes front-of-the-house living and gets you talking to your neighbors."**

a Seabee during World War II, transferred his skills at constructing military prefab housing to the civilian sector. His Levittown assembly methods, which included mass procurement of standardized materials, cranked out thousands of Cape Cod cottages—then later the prototypical ranch houses found in California—all set along curving streets and pockets formed by cul-de-sacs. The phrase "ticky-tacky housing" entered our vocabulary. But the tract housing was affordable, and Levitt set off a suburban building boom that has seldom since paused.

By 1990, upwards of 120 million Americans—about 45 percent—lived in suburbs. More than two-thirds of the country's 90 million housing units were single-family dwellings with a lawn out front. By the end of that decade, more than half of Americans lived in suburbs. From 1970 to 2000, while the population of central cities increased 19 percent, the suburbs ballooned by 60 percent. During the same period, the number of suburban jurisdictions increased by 7,300.

What all of those figures mean is that more than two million acres of open space, parks and farms disappear under asphalt and concrete every year—about 5,500 acres per day. On average each American driver now spends the equivalent of 55 eight-hour days on the roadways, and more than half of us live in places where the air is unsafe (by government standards) to breathe. The pavement raises the temperature of cities (five to 10 degrees in Phoenix and Las Vegas), which means we use yet more fossil fuel for air conditioning.

Suburbanization at this scale yanks the property tax base out from underneath the city, which leads to the decay of core infrastructure, a disincentive for investment and subsequent rises in abandoned buildings, poverty and crime. A recent report from the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit think tank, found that people living in high-sprawl areas walk less, have higher blood pressure and weigh more, a total effect on their health equal to aging four years. You can make a convincing argument that sprawl in the Las Vegas Valley has led to crack addicts prowling what was once the downtown residential district, while kids in Summerlin risk higher rates of asthma.

The reaction to these appalling and synergistic downsides of sprawl caused the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to join together in 1996 with several nonprofit organizations to form the Smart Growth



Civano, a New Urbanism village in Tucson using solar energy and xeriscaping, was a response to the city's commitment to energy and water conservation.

house, press the remote, enter in through the garage and go out to your walled back yard. We want a community without walls that emphasizes front-of-the-house living and gets you talking to your neighbors."

New Urbanism seems to be gaining popularity around the country, with perhaps as many as 400 such communities already built or under way. The most famous examples are Seaside and Celebration in Florida—the latter produced by Disney—both pedestrian-friendly communities that stand in stark opposition to the fenced, gated, patrolled and remote-controlled villas of Lake Las Vegas and Summerlin. A particularly successful New Urbanism town closer by is Civano in Tucson, Arizona, an 818-acre development that features solar energy, alternative construction techniques such as straw-bale, and xeriscaping in response to the city's emphasis on energy and water conservation.

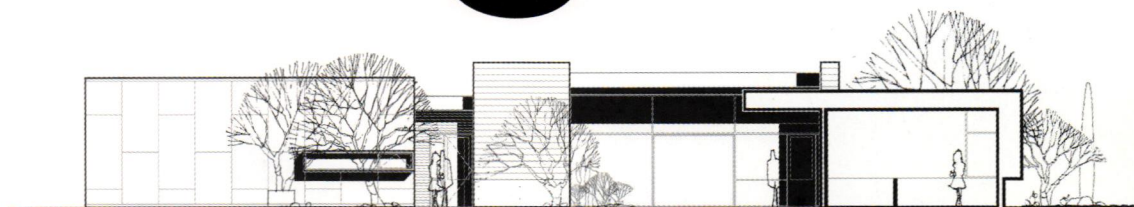
Although the Focus plans are still under review by the City of Henderson, Calvin Champlin, the company's director of planning, notes that they have features in common with the company's other recent projects in Las Vegas, such as extensive *continued on page 106*







# The Magnificent Seven



From an 'avant garde' high-rise to a 'ballsy' black box, we present the buildings that took top honors in the 10th annual AIA Nevada Design Awards **By Phil Hagen**

Each year the AIA Nevada Design Awards honor excellence in design and quality architecture. The program is open to all AIA Nevada members for projects anywhere in the world, and to architects from other states for projects inside Nevada. Each is judged on the basis of design merit and success in meeting the individual project requirements. The jury for this year's awards program included Ted Luna, AIA, Architect-Planner, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Kim Ferranti, AIA, aba-architects, Tuscon, Arizona; Randy Byers, AIA, TDSi, Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Jim Morter, FAIA, Morter Architects, Vail, Colorado.



**Washoe Medical Center, South Meadows  
Diagnostic & Treatment Pavilion**

**HMC Architects of Nevada  
Merit, Built**

This California-based firm's focus is modernizing and adding on to hospitals and schools. For the Washoe Medical Center, its Reno branch converted a rehabilitation hospital into an acute-care medical center and designed an addition that gave the campus a 52,000-square-foot diagnostic and treatment center. HMC not only accomplished the facility's modernization mission, but managed to make it look state-of-the-art as well, with curving, asymmetrical steel canopies, aluminum "store front" siding and tall, glass stairwells that feature hanging lamps of different shapes and lengths. The jurors found the shapes to be "wonderful" and the building overall to be "simple and elegant," especially the detailing. One detail that seems to sum up the whole project is the corner stairwell at the far end of the surgery department. The windows on both sides form an acute triangle, punctuated by their steel frames, which jut out perpendicularly like shelves all the way to the top. Then the roof takes this idea and sharpens it to a point. Like a ship's bow, it heaves slightly skyward, confidently heading into the future.



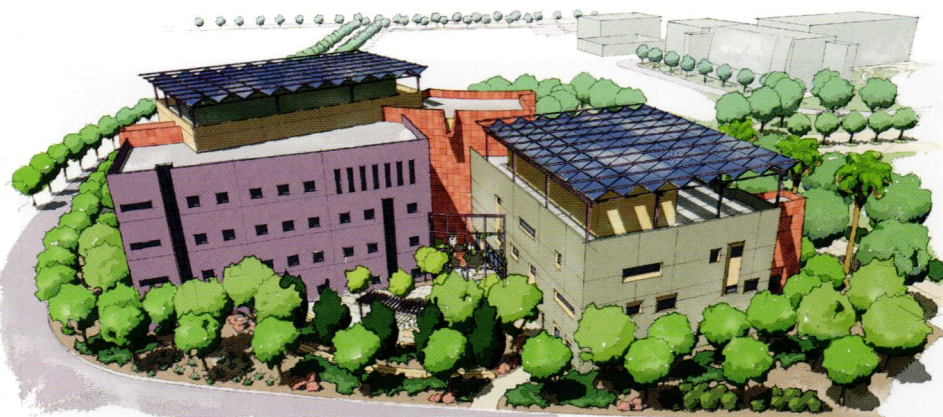




**Community College of Southern Nevada  
Health/Nursing Science Building,  
West Charleston Campus**

**JMA Architecture Studios  
Merit, Unbuilt**

This \$17 million, 85,400-square-foot building of laboratories and classrooms along College Drive and Oakey Boulevard looks to be a "handsome composition" with "well-executed" elevations and "a lovely melody of window placements," the jurors wrote. But the JMA architects had to do much more than create an attractive structure. The building, to be completed by June, has to not only fit into an existing (and growing) campus but "create a sense of identity and community" for the established health science area within that campus. To achieve the former goal, a third campus plaza was created (pictured above), completing the main pedestrian mall. The design team used "materials and muted desert colors that complemented the campus while setting the tone for future expansion." The former challenge was met with a covered walkway to connect the new building with the old buildings within the new plaza. Incorporating the walkway into the new main science building's lobby helps develop "a hierarchy of public outdoor and indoor spaces," according to JMA. A final goal was environmental efficiency. So the design team not only oriented the structure "to respect climatic condition," they planned a solar voltaic shade structure—a crown that is as cool as it looks.





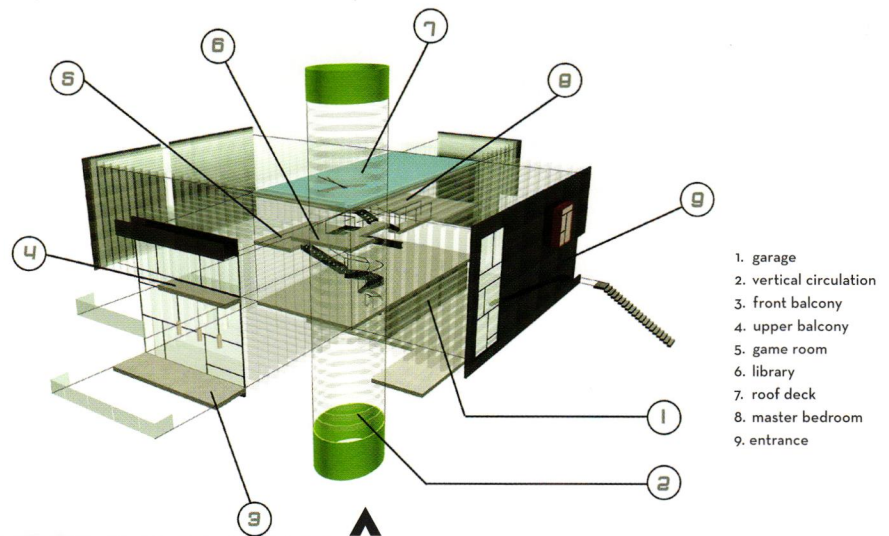
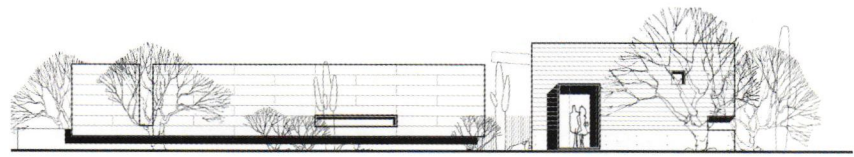
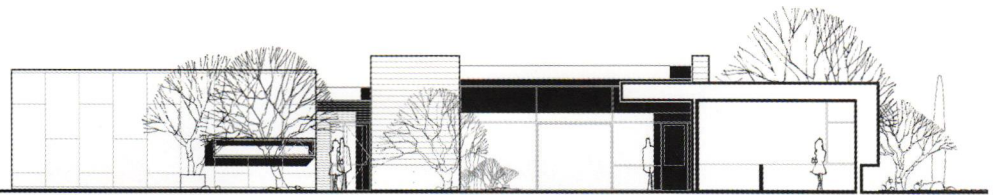
## Desert Home

assemblageSTUDIO  
Merit, Unbuilt

What would the architect who designed a home called the Black Box (see below) build for himself? Something unconventional for Las Vegas, yes, but judging from Desert Home, something that also seeks harmony. "The residence/studio is as much about living in the desert as it is about the architecture."

Eric Strain, AIA, stated in his submission. "The design seeks to create an atmosphere which encourages a blurring of the boundary between inside and out." So while the Black Box was designed for someone devoted to the indoors, Desert Home fits the man who enjoys the climate. Each of the 3,000-square-foot home's three structures surround what Strain calls the "Real Living Room," a courtyard with a pool. Instead of hallways, to get from the architect's studio or sleeping quarters to the kitchen, residents have to pass through this space. Strain banks on breeze patterns, the pool and shadowing from the structures to make this a tolerable task for his family during peak summer months.

The jurors appreciated the "desert materials used simply," which included rammed earth, concrete panels, wood framing and Corten steel. As Desert Home is sited on association-free land in Henderson, turning the plans into reality shouldn't be an issue.



1. garage
2. vertical circulation
3. front balcony
4. upper balcony
5. game room
6. library
7. roof deck
8. master bedroom
9. entrance

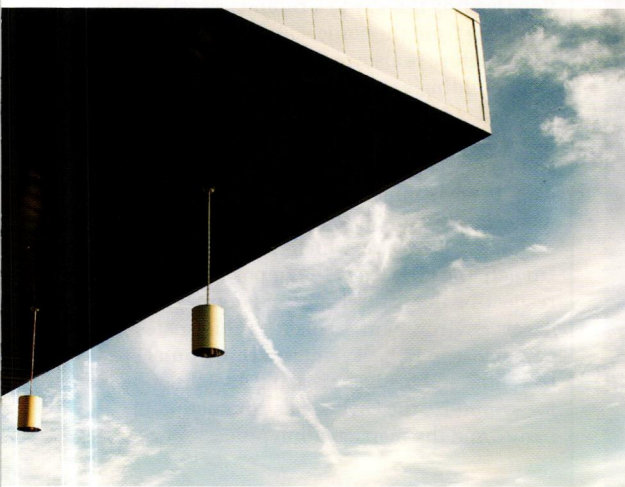


## The Black Box Residence

assemblageSTUDIO  
Merit, Unbuilt

"If we may be so bold," the jurors wrote, "it has balls." That the design of a Las Vegas home can inspire such a bold statement says something itself. The architect, Eric Strain, AIA, created this 3,500-square-foot home for a man seeking to establish a unique, strictly indoor living environment in Henderson's Seven Hills development. Inside, views of the Strip and the adjacent Black Mountains are built into the residence's active areas, and other forward-thinking features include a stairwell that functions to let in light as well as promote circulation, and a "heat chimney" beneath the glass and steel exterior skin, allowing cool air to be drawn in from the subterranean garage, pushing the hot air up through the roof. Outside, the simple but smart box draws its color (black) and form from its chief environmental feature, in stark contrast to its neighbors. While the home would stand bold in pretty much any American neighborhood, it is in this context where the balls really came into play. The four-level home is bookended by high-end homes that have gone the usual route, following the leader in Mediterranean themeing. While the jurors relished in this statement, calling it a "delightful jewel [that's] totally out of context but beautifully executed" and the design met all the community's criteria, the association wasn't exactly thrilled. And so the Black Box will forever be unbuilt.





## UNLV's Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center

assemblageSTUDIO  
Merit, Built

The mission was to design a "campus within a campus" that functions as a child-care center while providing for research by the faculty and students of the College of Education. Architect Eric Strain, AIA, came up with a "village," featuring separate classroom components, a multipurpose building/kitchen, research classrooms and an administration center. Each structure has its own identity, which in the case of the classrooms creates a hierarchy of space to give each age group a sense of ownership. Using steel framing, stucco, a variety of desert earth tones and lots of windows, Strain's village offers "a simple solution" yet "fun and fanciful," according to jurors. "Would love to be a kid there." The jurors highlighted the "nice integration of outdoor play areas," and this is where the Bennett can teach us something. The classroom buildings are not only arranged around a "Central Park"—with its varied elevations and surfaces (grass, sand, water, rubber)—but interact with it. Besides the floor-to-ceiling views, each has a large glass "garage door" that links to garden areas, allowing the classroom space to double in size. This seems to be the core of Strain's design point, judging from a quote that he included with his entry: "The change of weather, a butterfly in flight ... these should be learning experiences."







## Donald W. Reynolds Girl Scout Training & Service Center

Carpenter Sellers Associates  
Honor Award, Built

This 20,000-square-foot building not only facilitates education, it is an education. Designed to be a volunteer training ground, administrative center and workspace for the Girl Scouts Frontier Council, Carpenter Sellers went one step further, exposing structural and mechanical systems to communicate a building's physical needs and how it provides support, safety and comfort. "Nice to think of the architectural influence this building may have on the users of this facility," the jurors wrote. They specifically complimented the "trusses marching down the hallway" and the use of light throughout. Beyond educational, the results are beautiful and purposeful, starting with the entry gallery, which was designed to reflect and display the history of the Frontier Council, and to connect the distinctly different functions of the center (training and administration). One hallway uses natural light to point the way to the bust of the building's namesake (pictured below). Another has patterns in the concrete floor leading the way to a rotunda awash with sunshine from the conical skylight above. The latter feature is also a highlight of the single-story building's exterior, which Carpenter Sellers kept "simple" and "honest," using materials that reflect regional colors, forms and textures. The building strives to harmonize with its environment—both the neighborhood, which is older and has an eclectic range of uses, and its 2.5-acre site, which features xeriscaping "to help the girls learn the importance of respecting the natural state of landscape in a desert environment." This idea culminates with a final lesson in back, where a ceremonial space has paths and bridges crossing dry streambeds to "symbolize the Girl Scouts connection to nature and the matriculation process."







## ◀ The Summit High-Rise Luxury Condominiums

JMA Architecture Studios  
Honor Award, Unbuilt

This 73-story structure, which, come 2006, will climb to the shoulders of the Stratosphere, is one of the most dramatic statements of height and design coming our way in Las Vegas' new high-rise era. The jurors called the Summit "avant garde" and "enriching," "a contemporary ... high-rise solution that enhances the sculptural aspects of architecture." Sited on 2.2 acres at the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara Avenue, the Summit will anchor the north end of the Strip, providing a mix of luxury condos and amenities. The lower floors will be devoted to "come-and-go City Homes" that are fully furnished, and the uppermost 16 floors will consist of 151 homes for permanent residents. One lucky tenant will reside in the signature residence: the Sky Home, a 15,682-square-foot penthouse on the top floor. The jurors commented that JMA's plan "doesn't waste space," and indeed, it seems as if everything is neatly accounted for in one sleek urban package of stone and steel, including retail, club, podium deck/pool, spa and 10-level parking garage. There is also a secondary intent "to enhance and develop inner urban culture by creating open public spaces such as cafés and restaurants in order to ensure that the building is accessible and maintains a link to the community." JMA went so far as to call for "significant works of public art" inside the Summit to "foster cultural aspects and link the local arts community." ■








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**Wynn Las Vegas**

2005

**Bellagio**

1998

**Treasure Island**

1993

**The Mirage**

1989

**Golden Nugget**

1972

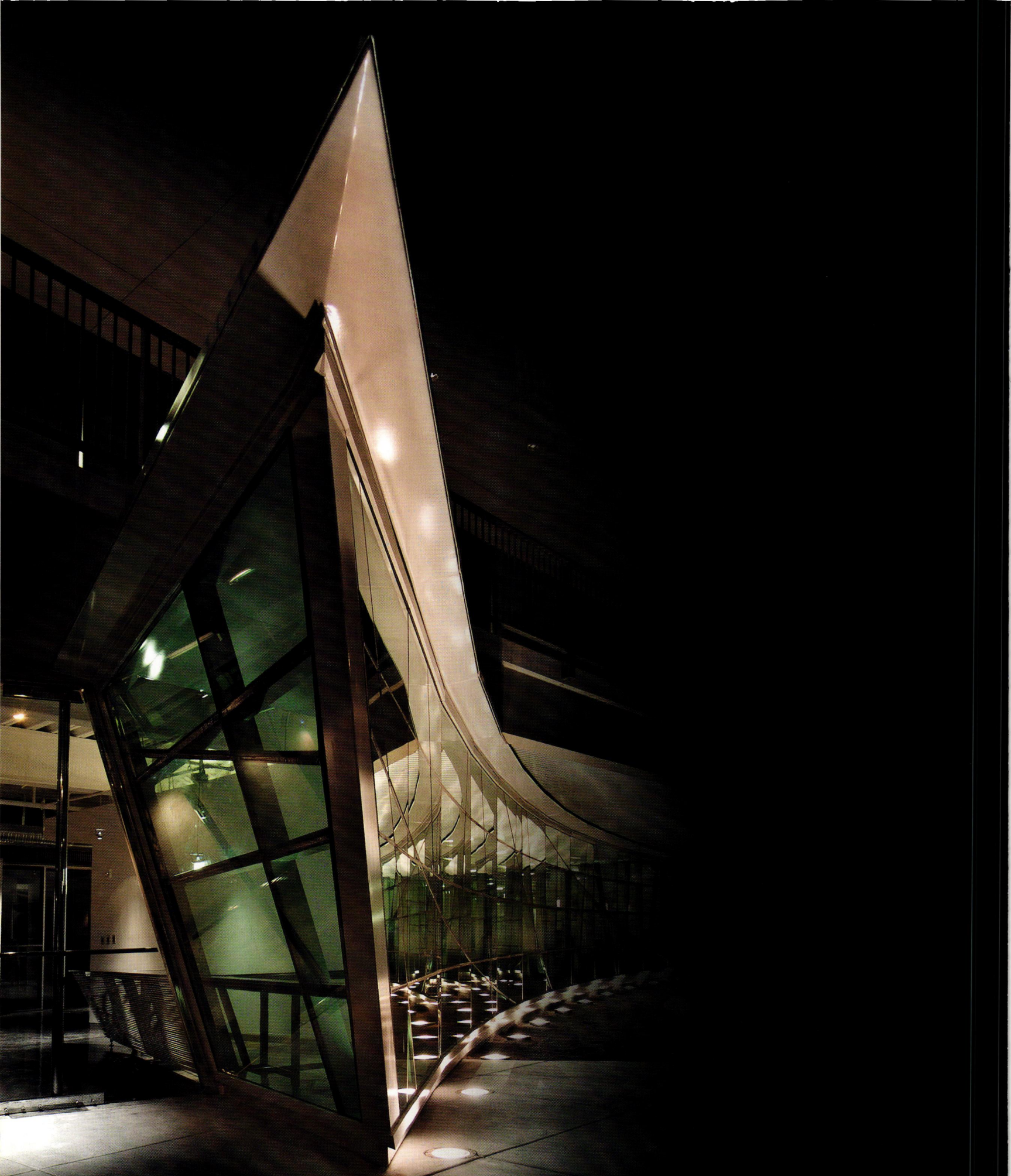
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**100** people,  
ideas, events  
and buildings that  
made this a  
one-of-a-kind city

# The Vegas Century

**SPECIAL  
SECTION**



# Events



The city's birthday in 1905 (above) and the War Memorial Building in 1936 (below).

## 1905 LAND AUCTION

The biggest gamble ever taken in Las Vegas occurred on the day it was born, May 15, 1905, when dozens of speculators from all over the West came for a land auction at the lot where the Plaza Hotel now sits. The event was such a huge success that it carried over to the next day. By sundown on May 16, William Clark's San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad had sold 110 acres of land—1,200 lots in all—for \$265,000 in what is now Downtown. Aside from the fact that the parcels bordered the rail line, there was little evidence that a town in the middle of the desert would ever flourish. Some 100 years and 1.7 million people later, land auctions remain synonymous with Southern Nevada's growth, thanks to the Bureau of Land Management. Last summer, the BLM auctioned off 71 parcels totaling 2,532 acres for a record \$709 million—more than twice the appraised value.

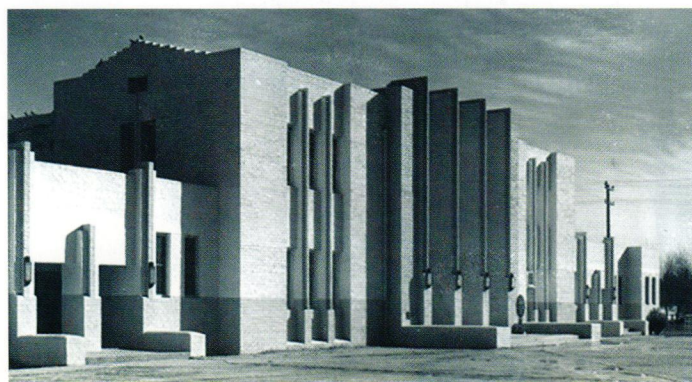
## LEGALIZATION OF GAMBLING

Next time you're dealt a four-of-a-kind, you might toast Phil Tobin, the Northern Nevada rancher behind the bill that was signed on March 19, 1931, making gambling legal statewide. The law took effect—fittingly—21 years after the state approved anti-

gambling legislation that was so strict, citizens were forbidden to flip a coin to decide who would buy a drink. Within a month of Tobin's law being passed, Las Vegas issued its first six gambling licenses—the first was to a woman, Mamie Stoker, who soon after opened the city's first gambling hall, the Northern Club. Today, there are nearly 1,900 active gaming licenses in Clark County and 166 nonrestricted casinos. Considering that almost 45 percent of the state's general fund is the direct result of gaming taxes—the vast majority of which are generated in Las Vegas—it's safe to say that, if not for Phil Tobin and his forward-thinking comrades in the Nevada Legislature, this thriving metropolis would be little more than a rest stop.

## THE WPA PROJECTS

Thanks to the Works Progress Administration, which was established by President Roosevelt in 1935 to combat the Depression, cities throughout the Southwest were able to build infrastructure, construct highways and rehabilitate urban areas on the government's dime. Las Vegas received its share of the federal booty and used it to, among other things, construct a city park (1935), its first convention center (the War Memorial Building, opened in 1936) and its first public golf course (1937). Though none of them exist today—City Hall sits on the site of the War Memorial Building—two other WPA projects remain symbols of the development of early Las Vegas: the paving and widening of the Los Angeles Highway (the modern-day Las Vegas Boulevard) and construction of the Bonanza Road Underpass. The latter, finished in 1936, was significant in that it improved access from the more dilapidated Westside to the progressive Eastside, where the majority of services were located. Additionally, thanks to the Bonanza Underpass, the Westside (then known as "Rag Town") was finally opened up to commercial trade as well as sewer, water and electricity services after 31 years.







Hoover Dam, which opened the door and flipped on the switch for today's Vegas.

#### UNVEILING HOOVER DAM

"I venture to hope that this dam, with its great storage of health and wealth and happiness for thousands of people, will stand as a definite opening of a new era with respect to the natural resources of America—an era of conservation, which means the prudent use of all our natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest number of our people. An era that will recognize the principle that the riches of forest and mine and water were not bestowed by God to be ruthlessly exploited in order to enhance the wealth of a small group of rugged individualists but ... given to us as endowment to be carefully used for the benefit of all the people. Under no other theory would the federal government be justified in so generously opening the doors of its treasure house for the building of this and other similar projects that will turn large sections of this breathtaking Western country into rich homesteads where a happy and contented people will find it possible to live those comfortable and worthwhile lives that we covet for every man, woman and child in these United States."

—Harold L. Ickes, U.S. Secretary of the Interior,  
at the dedication of Hoover Dam, September 30, 1935

#### QUICKIE MARRIAGES AND DIVORCES

Back in early 2004, while in the midst of partying it up at the Palms, pop princess Britney Spears dropped everything—including her cocktail—and traveled to the Little White Wedding Chapel to marry, on a whim, her childhood friend. Nearly 60 years earlier, another blond diva named Norma Jean Dougherty (a.k.a. Marilyn Monroe) arrived in Las Vegas with one goal in mind: to quickly divorce her husband, James. In between, hundreds of thousands of couples—many as famous as Britney and Marilyn—have come to town for the sole purpose of getting hitched or unhitched ... in

a hurry. Indeed, our liberal marriage and divorce laws are as much a part of our heritage as the blinding neon. In particular, the divorce statutes—citizens are required to live in a Nevada county for just six weeks to establish residency before being able to obtain a divorce decree—proved a key factor in the early development of Las Vegas. Disgruntled spouses from across the country found their way to both Las Vegas and Reno in the early 20th century, many staying in dude ranches that were erected specifically to house well-to-do visitors during their six-week stay. These ranches were so successful that they, along with the legalization of gambling and construction of Hoover Dam, fueled Las Vegas economically during the Great Depression. And, of course, unique Vegas ideas like instant weddings have helped keep the city virtually recession-proof ever since.



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**Images** Many of the photographs and other visuals were provided courtesy of the Las Vegas News Bureau and UNLV's Special Collections

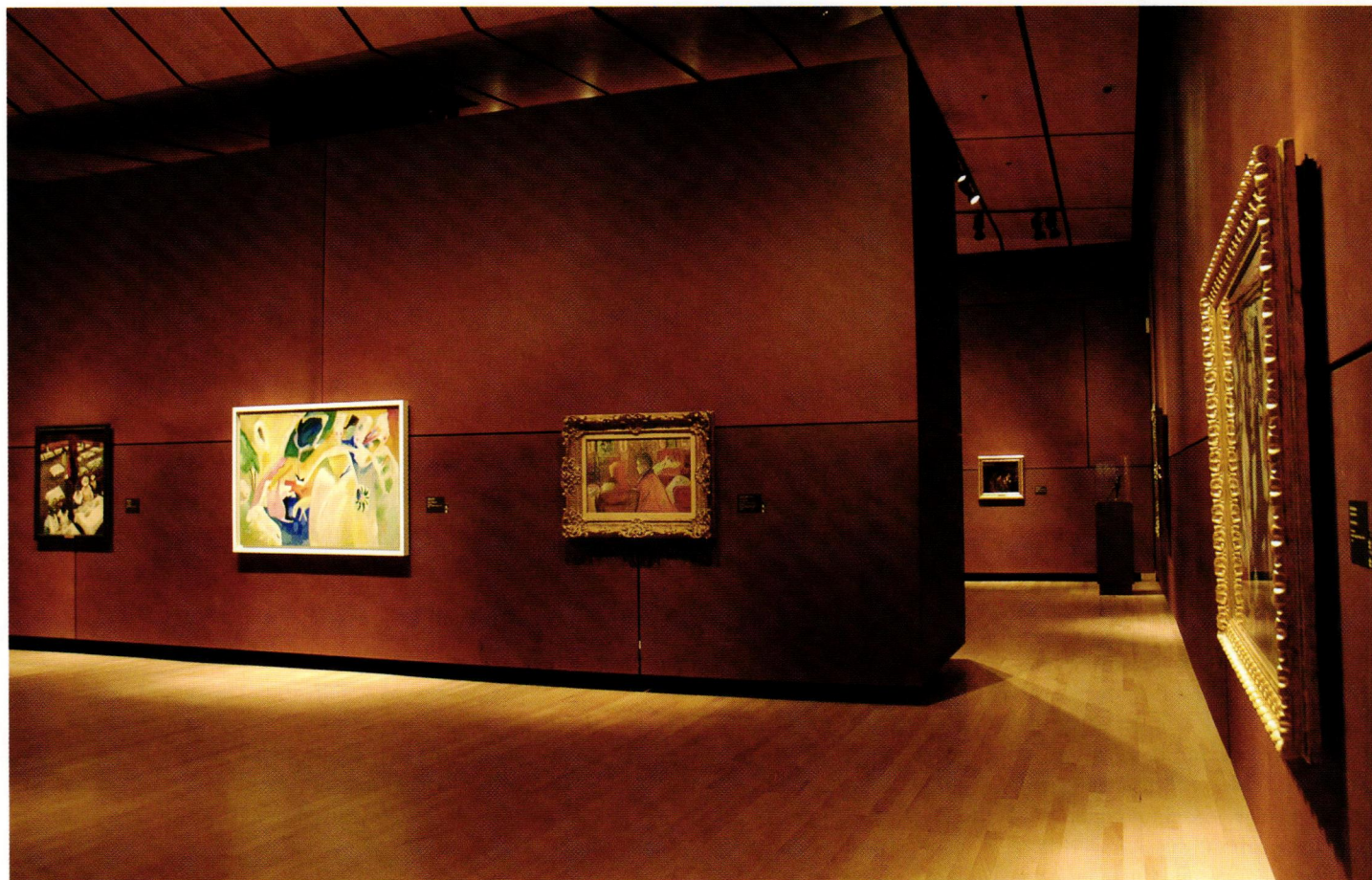
**Researchers** Jeanne Brown, Head Librarian, UNLV Architecture Studies Library; Courtney Mooney, History Preservation Officer, City of Las Vegas; Debi Raffi, Communications Manager, AIA Las Vegas



*We Did It Our Way!*



# Events



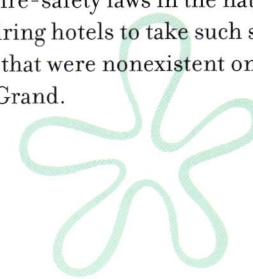
The Rem Koolhaas-designed Guggenheim Hermitage Museum, a.k.a. "The Jewel Box."

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEVADA BOARD OF ARCHITECTURE

So you want to practice architecture in Nevada? Well, hope you have some time on your hands—about 13 years. Because that's about how long it takes to earn certification from the stringent Nevada Board of Architecture. First, there's the undergraduate studies, followed by the minimum five-year accredited degree, followed by a mandatory three-year internship before, finally, you get the privilege of taking a nine-part exam that's as grueling as any in the country. Pull it off and you get to join the 2,800 national and local architects (and 200 registered interior and residential designers) who are licensed by the 56-year-old board. "The whole purpose of our board is to protect public safety and welfare, and to ensure there are qualified practitioners out there," says Gina Spaulding, executive director. "We are absolutely committed to continually increasing public awareness of the benefits of hiring registrants."

## MGM GRAND FIRE

For the 5,000 people inside the original MGM Grand on the morning of November 21, 1980, there was no warning sign that a faulty wire inside a deli was about to turn the 26-story structure into a raging inferno. And for far too many, there was no escape. By the time the toxic smoke had cleared, the final statistics were chilling: 87 dead, hundreds injured, thousands scarred emotionally and one city forever changed. If there was one silver lining in the second deadliest hotel fire in U.S. history—as well as in the Las Vegas Hilton fire that occurred a year later—it was that some of the most stringent fire-safety laws in the nation were subsequently enacted, requiring hotels to take such steps as installing the kind of sprinklers that were nonexistent on that deadly Friday morning at the MGM Grand.





## GROWTH

At age 100, Las Vegas may finally be all grown up, but certainly not grown "out." The area that was inhabited by only 3,370 people in 1910 and 463,000 on the city's 75th birthday in 1980 now boasts more than 1.7 million, including 517,000 within the city limits. The last figure makes Las Vegas the nation's 30th most populous city—up from 67th in 1990. The biggest spurt occurred during the 1990s, when the Valley grew by 83 percent, making it the fastest growing metropolis in the country. And with 8,000 people moving to Southern Nevada each month, there's no end in sight.

## THE GUGGENHEIM LAS VEGAS OPENING

"The Guggenheim is not the first cultural institution to have a presence in Las Vegas, nor is it the first occasion for world-class art to be seen in this city. However, the components involved—the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Rem Koolhaas, joining forces with the Venetian—make it by far the most ambitious program to date." Of those words uttered by Venetian Chairman Sheldon Adelson during the announcement of plans to build a 63,700-square-foot Guggenheim museum with two exhibit spaces inside his resort, you can't help but focus on one: *ambitious*. In retrospect, such an idea fits like, well, a massive Guggenheim in a Vegas casino. And there are many reasons given as to why the "Big Box," which opened in late 2001, had failed by early 2003: Koolhaas' design was too "over the top"; the opening (and closing) exhibit designed by Frank Gehry, "The Art of the Motorcycle," was the wrong choice; Sin City was the wrong place to gamble on a Guggenheim. Perhaps it was all simply too ambitious. And perhaps we're simply left with the piece of the project that was meant to be all along: The Guggenheim Hermitage museum, "The Jewel Box," still welcomes visitors daily to its priceless collections of some of the world's best art.

## FOUNDING UNLV'S SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

By the late 1970s, with the Strip blooming and infrastructure developing rapidly around it, Las Vegas was the perfect breeding ground for architects. Yet UNLV, situated just blocks from our world-famous corridor, didn't offer coursework in the trade. In fact, Nevada was one of just two states that lacked an architecture school. Recognizing a need and realizing the long-range benefits, professional architects within the community gathered in 1979 with the goal of establishing a program at UNLV. Within two years, some of those architects were teaching preliminary courses on campus, and by 1985, the state had fully funded the program, which was initially housed in the College of Engineering. Before decade's end, UNLV was offering courses

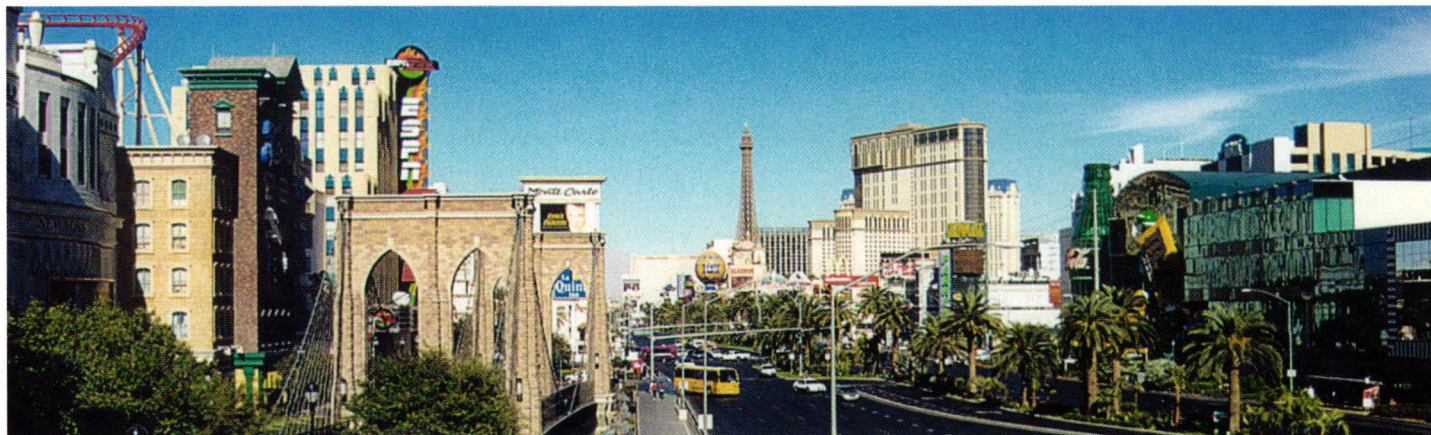
not only in the main discipline, but in interior architecture and design, as well as landscape architecture and planning. In 1996, the three programs were reorganized as the School of Architecture and placed within the College of Fine Arts. A year later, the 76,000-square-foot Paul B. Sogg Architecture Building opened. And that's where this year's 637 students are working toward becoming the next generation's top designers. "When I look at programs around the country that are 100, 150 years old, to see how far we've come in less than 30 years is, to me, just one step short of amazing," says Dr. Michael Kroelinger, director of the School of Architecture, which is currently going through a re-accreditation process. "And as this school matures, we're going to have a much more significant impact on Las Vegas and the region. So this opportunity to be in an urban university setting in a rapidly growing geographical area creates wonderful opportunities for studio and classroom exploration of issues critical to the future of the city and the region." ✨



The library at UNLV's School of Architecture.



# Places



The engine of the nation's fastest growing city: the Las Vegas Strip.

## THE STRIP

Is the architecture here real? Perhaps there's a better question: Does it work? Here's one way to answer that: the Las Vegas Strip, which 60 years ago wasn't much more than a narrow road through barren desert, annually draws more than 38 million people who keep the world's highest concentration of hotel rooms nearly 90 percent full on average (the national number is less than 60) while contributing nearly \$4.8 billion in gaming revenue and, from convention-goers alone, more than \$6.5 billion non-gaming revenue to an economy that has fueled the country's fastest growing community. And there are no signs of our engine slowing down. Despite booming gaming competition across the border and nationwide, visitors from California are up 10 percent over the last two years, and McCarran International Airport

smashed another traffic record in 2004. Evidently the Strip has built something people want—no matter what time of year or cycle in the economy—and can't get anywhere else.

## FREMONT STREET THEN

When Nevada legalized gambling in 1931, it looked at Fremont Street as the natural hub. It established a "red-line" district, restricting gaming to Fremont between First and Third streets. By the 1940s, it was the aspect of the economy that shone brightest—literally. Neon took off after World War II, with such casinos as the Frontier, Eldorado, Pioneer, Las Vegas Club, El Cortez and, the jewel of the bunch, Golden Nugget aglow in the dark. Glitter Gulch was born. By the late 1950s, older casinos along Fremont had either been refurbished to match the Nugget's style—the Pioneer's answer in 1951 was Vegas Vic—or demolished completely to make room for such marvels as Binion's Horseshoe (1951), the Mint (1957) and Fremont (1956), Downtown's first high-rise. Through the next two decades, even as the Strip began to flourish, Glitter Gulch continued to expand, as the Union Plaza, California and Lady Luck joined the landscape.

## FREMONT STREET NOW

The Mirage's arrival on the Strip in 1989 signaled the start of tough times for Fremont Street. In response, city officials closed the once famous cinematic backdrop to vehicle traffic and turned it into a pedestrian mall. The highlight is a 90-foot-high canopy—stretched over a 1,400-foot, four-block section of Fremont Street—that each night displays elaborate light and laser shows synchronized to music. Unveiled in December 1995, the





Fremont Street Experience has pumped some new life into the area, but not nearly enough to return Fremont Street to its once proud place as Las Vegas' epicenter.

### LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER

If you build it, they will come. That's been this city's mantra, and the Las Vegas Convention Center has certainly lived up to it. Opened just east of the Strip in April 1959 (at the behest of city leaders who were eager to tap into a new tourist sector), the Convention Center originally featured a 20,340-square-foot rotunda, 18 meeting rooms and a 90,000-square-foot exhibit hall. Several significant expansions later, the 3.2 million-square-foot LVCC is now the nation's third-largest convention facility, with about 2 million square feet of exhibit space alone. In its first full year, in 1960, the venue welcomed 45,000 delegates for 14 shows, good for a \$5.1 million non-gaming economic impact. By 2003, those numbers skyrocketed to 72 shows, 1.2 million conventioners and an economic impact of \$1.6 billion. Considering those statistics—not to mention the fact the facility spawned numerous convention centers in hotels throughout town—it's easy to see why the LVCC has been one of our city's key engines. The convention authority will soon launch a \$400 million expansion and renovation of the Convention Center, including a new grand entryway; second- and third-floor meeting rooms; more walkways within the complex; and an enclosed passageway linking the Las Vegas Monorail station to the center's South Hall. The convention authority's administrative offices and engineering department would also be moved to a new stand-alone building to be built behind the center off Joe W. Brown Drive.

### MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

There's no better symbol of Las Vegas' growth—and growing popularity—over the past half century than the airport. Originally christened McCarran Field in the early 1930s and located where Nellis Air Force Base sits today, the airport was relocated shortly after World War II to Alamo Field at the south end of Las Vegas Boulevard to meet demand. By 1948, 35,000 passengers had come through, a figure that would soar to more than a million in 1962, when the airport was moved again, this time to its current site off Paradise Road. A \$30 million expansion in 1974 preceded the "McCarran 2000" project, a three-phase, \$300 million master plan that in 20 years delivered a new central terminal, a 9,000-vehicle parking garage, runway upgrades and expansions, dozens of new gates and the airport connector tunnel. The 25-gate "D" concourse completed the final phase of McCarran 2000, and today there are 77 gates in the four-concourse main terminal, plus an additional eight in Terminal 2. And there's more to come:

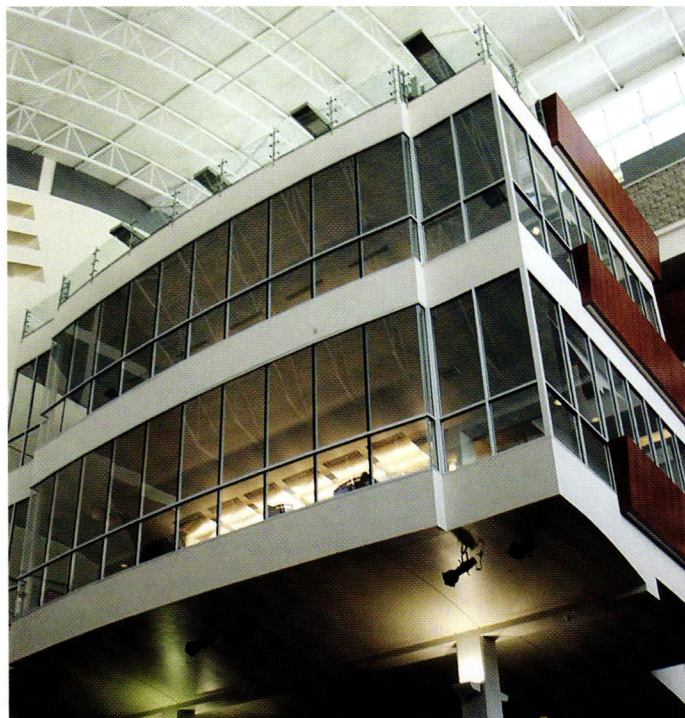
A 10-gate addition to the "D" concourse is expected to open in April, and a third, 16-gate terminal near Russell Road is slated for completion in 2010. Still, it might not be enough. Officials project McCarran, now the 12th busiest airport in the world with 40 million passengers in 2004, will reach its 50 million-passenger capacity in less than a decade. Perhaps more impressive than the rapid growth is the fact that McCarran has managed to consistently keep passengers happy. In a customer-satisfaction survey released late last year, the airport ranked ninth among the world's 22 largest airports.



McCarran International Airport's D Gates.



# Places



UNLV's Lied Library (above) and Henderson's Pavilion (below).

## SUMMERLIN

Howard Hughes never was the type to play by conventional rules in amassing his fortune. But even his closest confidants must have thought the eccentric tycoon had gone off his rocker when, in 1952, he purchased 25,000 acres of land way out on the western edge of the Las Vegas Valley. Hughes, though, had a plan: to turn the land into a new company headquarters and research laboratory for Hughes Aircraft. That, however, never came to fruition, and the land sat dormant. As the decades passed and the taxes and carrying costs began to far exceed the land's value, it seemed Hughes had made a mistake. But his kin figured otherwise. In 1976, a decade after Hughes died, the company founded by his heirs, Summa Corporation, gathered a team of the country's top land planners and together they did what Howard Hughes did best: rolled the dice and won. They devised a grandiose plan to turn the barren desert into a sprawling, striking residential community. Today, Summerlin is the nation's top-selling master-planned community and home to nearly 90,000 Las Vegas residents, 18,000 employees, dozens of parks, and 19 public and private schools. Named for Hughes' paternal grandmother, Summerlin welcomed its first family in 1991. Less than 15 years later and barely halfway to build-out, it is the model by which Las Vegas' success as a vibrant American community is measured. And somewhere, Howard Hughes is having the last laugh.

## SCHOOLS

What is it like having the fastest-growing school district in the universe? Back in 1988, when voters approved the first of four school-bond issues, there were 138 schools. Today, that number is 316. The statistics get more mind-boggling from there:

- \$5.5 billion: cost of all bonds issued since 1988.
- 30 million: square feet that our schools will cover by the time those bonds expire in 2008, including more than one million square feet of portable units.
- 80 million: square feet of school landscaping.
- \$41.1 million: cost of utilities—gas, electric and water—incurred by the district in the 2003-04 school year.
- 260,000: dataports inside the schools.
- 100,000: tons of air-conditioning units used to keep students, teachers and faculty cool ... or enough to chill 12 Empire State buildings.
- 72: projected number of new schools in the next decade.

## UNLV CAMPUS

This has long been the home of architectural experimentation and a chance to implement the latest technology to better educate UNLV's growing number of students and to serve the city. A recent example is the Beam Music Center (completed in 2001), an \$8 million facility designed by Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini that won the Unbuilt Merit Award from AIA Nevada for its beautiful exterior (showcased along Maryland Parkway) as well as its state-of-the-art accommodations inside. Twenty-first-century marriages of high technology and beautiful design are also exemplified in the Lied Library (see separate entry under "Buildings") and the Stan Fulton International Gaming Institute, which, just blocks from the Las Vegas Strip, contains a laboratory that allows students to simulate the operating of a casino. The 350-acre UNLV campus itself is noteworthy in that it's a nationally recognized arboretum (less than 10 percent of the country's campuses are so designated), with the highlight being the enlightening Xeric Garden—the first in Nevada to feature drought-tolerant plants.





## Shadow Creek

*Jack Sheehan on golf-course designer Tom Fazio's miracle in the desert*

When Steve Wynn told several longtime Las Vegas golfers in the mid-1980s that he was going to build a golf course in North Las Vegas that would rank as one of the best in the world, cynicism reigned. Sure, Wynn knew the hotel-casino business inside out and would come to be considered in the next decade as the Walt Disney of grown-up entertainment, but even if you combined the wisdom of the legendary Scottish golf course architect Donald Ross with the playing savvy of Ben Hogan and Jack Nicklaus, you couldn't create Pebble Beach or Pinehurst out of pancake-flat caliche on a patch of desert appropriate only for body dumping.

And yet within two years of its opening in October 1989, both *GOLF* and *Golf Digest* magazines had added Wynn's dream, which he poetically named Shadow Creek, to its "Top 20 Courses in the U.S." lists. And in June 2000, the *Robb Report's* "Best of the Best" issue called Shadow Creek "the best golf course in the world." It beat out finalists such as Cypress Point, Augusta National, Pine Valley and St. Andrews.

How did Wynn accomplish this miracle? It started with coercing the great architect Tom Fazio to take on the challenge of sculpting a masterpiece from, as Fazio puts it, "a blank palette."

"I realized it was the only time I would ever have total control over the environment to create something from nothing, and I had an open checkbook to make it happen," Fazio said in the first interview he gave about the course.

Millions of acres of dirt were moved, more than 10,000 trees of appropriate shape and color were imported from the Pacific Northwest, and an intricate water system created meandering



Shadow's 18th hole, a "natural" beauty.

creeks and splashy waterfalls. Chinese pheasants and graceful swans patrol the ponds, and even wallabies were brought in to bound gleefully along the fairways.

Wynn had elaborate, six-figure models made up to replicate the holes before they were completed, and he even enlisted his friend Steven Spielberg's film crew to shoot pictures of the surrounding mountain ranges to better understand the play of light and shadow on the lush green fairways and snow-white sands that would color his dream.

Shadow Creek not only redefined the terrain on which it was painted, it elevated the sport of golf to the short list of things to do here, while raising the level of respect for golf in Las Vegas.

Jack Sheehan is a Las Vegas-based writer who has authored several books on golf, including *Buried Lies: True Tales and Tall Stories* from the PGA Tour.

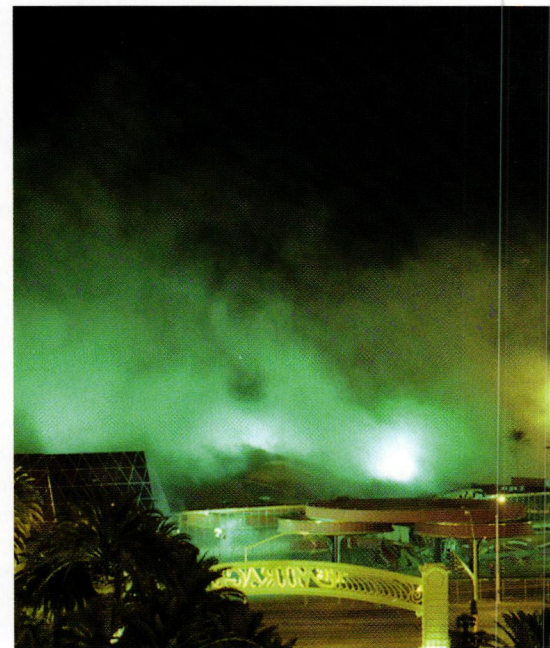
### LIBERTY POINTE

A family living in Henderson really could build its entire non-working life around the intersection of Paseo Verde Drive and Green Valley Parkway. For shopping, dining and entertainment, there's Green Valley Ranch Station and The District; for education, a couple of elementary schools are within a block; and for everything else, there's Liberty Pointe. Here, just west of Discovery Park, is a collection of public structures including an amphitheater (the Henderson Pavilion), the Paseo Verde Library, a police

substation (hopefully you won't be spending much time there) and an 84,120-square-foot recreation facility (the Henderson Multigenerational Center). The Pavilion, designed by Anderson Mason Dale, is the landmark of the complex, with a canopy whose white peaks can be seen from miles away. But two Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini designs are equally impressive: the "Multigen" manages to be both sleek and inviting; and the library, whose jagged lines echo the nearby McCullough mountains, features a glass-walled reading room that overlooks the entire Valley. ❁



# Concepts



The Sands' last stand, on November 26, 1996.

## THE TRI-WING HOTEL

Perhaps, in driving down our infinitely varied tourist corridor, you've noticed a certain sameness behind the shooting flames and water spritz. The hotels! Peel off the gingerbread and they all look the same! OK, not all of them, but from Bellagio to the Venetian, the tri-wing hotel design—sometimes known as the Y-design—is clearly the skeleton of choice on the Strip. It all started in the mid-1960s, when Martin Stern Jr. designed the International (now the Hilton) for Kirk Kerkorian. Stern's great insight was that connected hotel wings arranged around a hub could share a common infrastructure—from elevator shafts to service facilities—and operate more efficiently than independent towers. For nearly 40 years, the Strip's boldest builders and biggest dreamers have offered Stern their sincerest flattery—and today, behind all the Euroluxe tchotchkes and tropical brush strokes, the Strip's true and unifying theme appears to be the 25th letter in the alphabet.

## REINVENTION

From Wild West gambling town to quickie wedding/divorce capital to Glitter Gulch to desert oasis to Entertainment Capital of the World to city of cheap eats to Elvis mecca to Megaresort family destination to Megaresort adult destination (starring a few chefs many people have heard of) to Megaresort high-end destina-

tion (with not-so-cheap eats and lots of chefs many people have heard of) to shopping mecca to ... well, those are just some of the many faces of Las Vegas, taking us up to the year 2001, when Bill Eadington, director of UNR's Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming, told the Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel that, you know, Las Vegas really needs to reinvent herself again to sustain the pace because Steve Wynn's was the only major project planned for the next four years. "What is called for is an appeal to the next generation." About 16 seconds later, Las Vegas cracked open a dozen ultralounges, a handful of high-end strip clubs, a place called the Palms and a brand-new slogan, all of which delivered enough hipsters, pop stars and Hilton sisters to fill our 130,000 rooms and a daily gossip column. Any other requests? Yes, we can do high rises ...

## EXPLOSION

One moment we're flaunting our backyard nuclear tests with cheesecake publicity photos of Miss Atomic Cloud and inviting tourists to come watch, the next we're aghast that casks containing nuclear waste might someday be buried in a mountain 100 miles away. Since Sin City mushroomed into a full-blown city, we've grown a little picky. But we'll proudly take some credit for, if not having a hand in inventing the Atomic Age, influencing its design movement in the 1950s and '60s. After LA gave birth to



Google design, Vegas raised it into a crazy teenager who just knew all things were possible in this American life, and in this particular city there were no restrictions on imagination. Atomic symbols, mushroom clouds, starbursts, missiles, rockets, space, unbridled energy and ideas. Nothing said "To infinity and beyond!" like the Stardust and Dunes signs. Or the Landmark. Those visions of neon splendor may not have reshaped American design as we knew it—not as much as the Test Site itself—but you could certainly argue that they made the American statement the loudest in their time.

### IMPLOSION

The technique has been around for about a century, but like a lot of things, Vegas took building implosions to the next level. In terms of quantity, the Strip has had quite a run since 1993, when Steve Wynn and 600 pounds of dynamite took down the Dunes. Like dominoes, down went the Landmark, El Rancho, Hacienda, Aladdin, the Sands ... In terms of style, well, leave it to Vegas to make the destruction of famous architecture a moment in pop culture, whether as a New Year's Eve TV special (the Hacienda) or spectacular prop for Hollywood (*Mars Attacks!*). While implosion continues to facilitate our concept of reinvention, of the Strip as a gigantic movie set whose parts are expendable when the next idea comes along, that hand has been played out. Once again, only implosion geeks (see [www.implosionworld.com](http://www.implosionworld.com)) care that much about the art of hotel demolition. The rest of us have moved on.

### THE GLASS POOL INN

Forget today's wonderfully lucrative concept of reinvention for a second. What a tiny motel south of the Strip came up with in 1955 didn't shift any paradigms, like Steve Wynn's Mirage did in 1989. This Mirage—the original one, before Wynn bought the name—did what our city was originally famous for: standing the simplest idea on its head to attract attention. You don't need to see into a motel pool, and you certainly don't need to see out. But the idea that you can if you want to—that's brilliant. That and the simple fact that no one else thought of it first. What other place but Las Vegas would have inspired the owners back then, the Rosoff family, to add a pool with windows in front of a 22-room motel? After selling the name, the Rosoffs merely changed their sign to what was probably more marketable anyway: The Glass Pool Inn. Let another place call itself The Mirage; for 48 years, to those passing motorists wondering just how much farther it was to Fabulous Las Vegas, the inn with the glass pool must have actually seemed one.

## Vertical Building

We've been climbing for 50 years

The soil was too hard (caliche). Or too soft (high water tables). Or maybe because land was abundant and cheap; or the "Western tradition" of motels, bungalows, ranch houses ruled. For whatever reason, Las Vegas kept a low profile. That is until the Riviera in 1955 went up 11 stories, and the next year the Fremont downtown built 15. Next year, the Mint. Then, in the '60s, the "motels" added towers: DI, Sands, Dunes. New resorts started out high: Caesars, the Sahara. Frank Carroll planned, in 1961, his Landmark to be the highest building in Nevada at 15 stories; by the time Howard Hughes finished it in 1969 that distinction required 31. HH, KK and Del Webb dueled. There followed a flurry of high-rise apartment and condominium activity in the mid-1970s: Six went up between the Las Vegas Country Club and Harmon, including Regency Towers and Vegas Towers. And Country Club Towers, where a condo could be had for \$60,000—and they were by buyers such as Colonel Tom Parker, Rodney Dangerfield and Bobby Riggs. The MGM Grand fire of 1980, followed by the Las Vegas Hilton's in '81, brought ultra-strict fire codes with skyrocketing construction costs. The resorts, though, plowed ahead. Alan Hess has noted the impact of the big corporations and the transformation which began at about this time, when "... the sparse recreational strip became a dense urban corridor." But residential construction took a 20-year hiatus, until soaring land costs again made high-rise construction viable.



The 40-story Turnberry towers.

At the end of 2000, two projects opened: Irwin Molasky's twin 20-story condo buildings (Park Towers) in the Howard Hughes Center, and Miamians Donald and Jeffrey Soffer's quad 40-story condos (Turnberry Place) on Paradise Road. Both based their ventures on Florida's experience with a growing retirement community and a booming destination resort, and designed the projects accordingly. Both sold out quickly. Today there are 50 to 80 high-rise residential projects either under construction or on the boards. And those who worried about Las Vegas' sprawl now fret over the new density.





*near*



**M**anhattan's skyscrapers, Pasadena's bungalows, Ford's River Rouge plant, Minnesota's grain elevators, Wright's Fallingwater, San Francisco's bridges and Las Vegas' neon signs: all are exceptional contributions to American architecture and urbanism. All emerged from elemental American forces of technology, nature, opportunity, populism and wealth. But while Las Vegas' neon has achieved fame, it has not received its due honor in that pantheon. "An idiot Disneyland with lights," critic John Gregory Dunne described it in 1974.

There have been other Cities of Light, of course. At about the same time Las Vegas was founded, New York's Broadway entered the popular consciousness as the Great White Way, aglitter with incandescent nighttime displays. But Times Square, a district of standard urban office blocks encrusted with signs and light bulbs to advertise theaters and products, was a different design creature than Las Vegas. It was impressive but conceptually distinct from the glittering gulch of Fremont Street at its zenith in the

in their earthy, solid facades, the neon of Las Vegas defined their age in magnetic images and cutting-edge technology.

Fremont Street in the 1950s was only one of several distinct incarnations of Las Vegas' neon urbanism from the 1930s to today. It's a remarkable chapter in American architecture that highlights a significant truth: Great architecture can be created outside the conventional academies and methods. No Astors or Vanderbilts commissioned these signs. No Beaux Arts or Bauhaus-trained architects thought them up. Architectural journals rarely even noted them, before Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour wrote about them in a 1968 *Architectural Forum*. "Learning from Las Vegas" described the de facto theory embodied in an established phenomenon that used neon to shape space.

This fact forces a significant question: How did this powerful, cohesive architecture evolve outside the usual professional circles?

In fact Las Vegas did not evolve in isolation. It grew from trends and examples and designers at work in the popular commercial culture of the West. It took full advan-

## The Viva author salutes the brightest star in Las Vegas' design universe *by Alan Hess*

1950s. There the entire architecture was light, "more convincing than many an attempt to create the same kind of effect, the same pedestrian dominance, by means of solid and conventional architecture," Reyner Banham judged in 1970. Entire facades for blocks were plastered with glowing light. Neon spires and crenellations rose in jagged silhouette against the black desert sky. It was ethereal, opulent, weightless. It placed its citizens not in a canyon of masonry with outcroppings of light, but in an entire glowing environment that turned night into day, that replaced the warmth of the sun with the heat of neon. This creation was powerful enough to rival both desert sunsets and atomic bomb blasts on the nearby Yucca Flats testing range. What other architecture can claim the same?

Las Vegas neon was never simply about individual signs. Their impact was always collective, underscoring an innate urbanism. Just as the brownstones of Boston defined an age

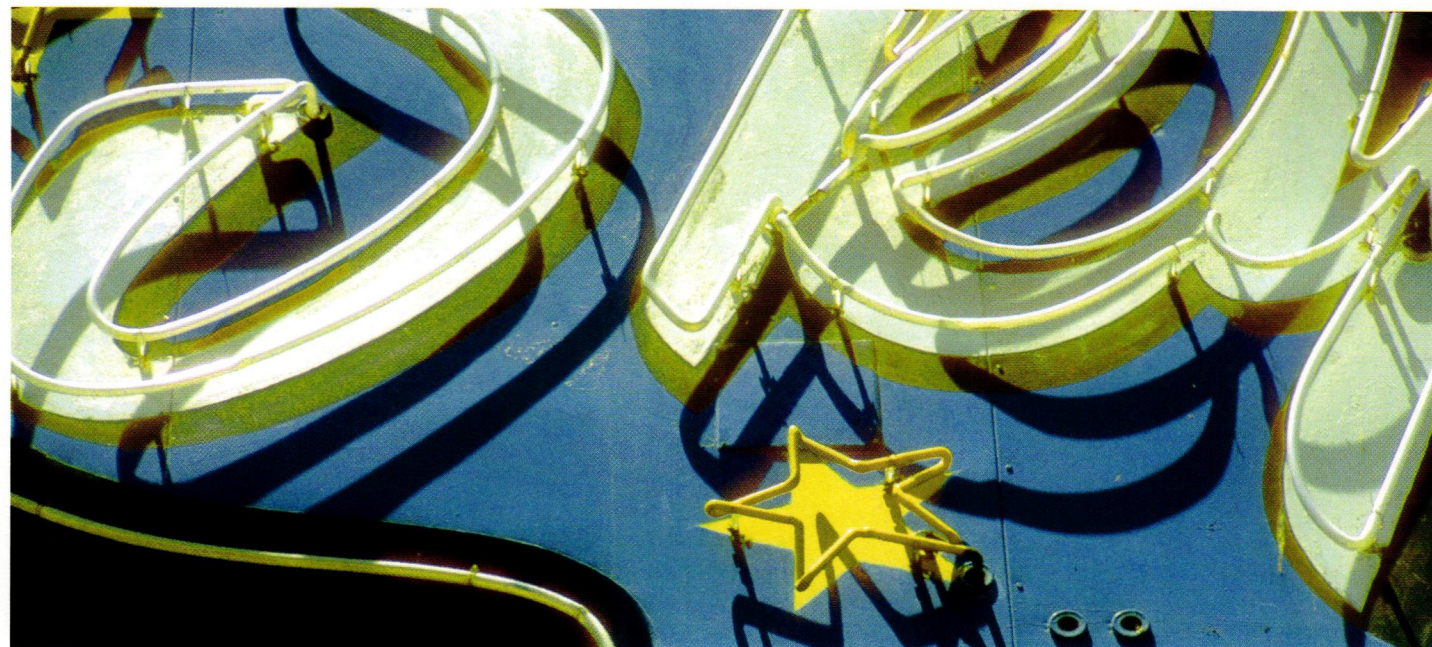
tage of the freedom this allowed, and leveraged apparent weaknesses into strengths.

Neon was still relatively new when Las Vegas appropriated it. Invented in France, neon was first used in the United States by Los Angeles car dealer Earl C. Anthony (a patron of the freethinking Bernard Maybeck). By the mid-1930s it was in wide use for advertising signage on Main Streets throughout America and was already finding even more creative applications in major cities. Las Vegas followed suit with neon vane signs and marquees bolted to the outside of one- and two-story Fremont Street casinos, bars and hotels.

But then the influence of the local culture and economy stepped in. Neon being found effective in promoting one establishment, the neighboring establishment chose (at the encouragement of neon sign installers like Thomas Young of the fabled Young Electric Sign Company) to make a bigger and more expressive sign, with more *continued on page 107*



# Concepts



The Neon Boneyard (above), where old Vegas signs come to rest, and (below) a 21st-century version of Strip signage, "The Cloud" at the Fashion Show mall.

## WELCOME TO FABULOUS LAS VEGAS SIGN

As landmarks go, this is our Statue of Liberty. Not in terms of sheer size, of course. At less than 25 feet tall, it would be little more than a freckle on her copper face. But the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign that Betty Willis designed and city officials erected at the southern end of the Strip back in 1959 is no less cherished. Originally, the blinking neon landmark, which still sits on a barren median on Las Vegas Boulevard, served as a gateway to the Strip; as soon as eager tourists driving into town got a glimpse of it, they knew that clanging slot machines and dancing showgirls and Wayne Newton were only moments away. Today, because the Strip is mostly accessed via Interstate 15, visitors have to go out of their way to view the famous sign—and they do, oftentimes cheating death by racing across three lanes just to take a snapshot next to Willis' enduring creation. They know that no serious Vegas vacation would be complete without it.

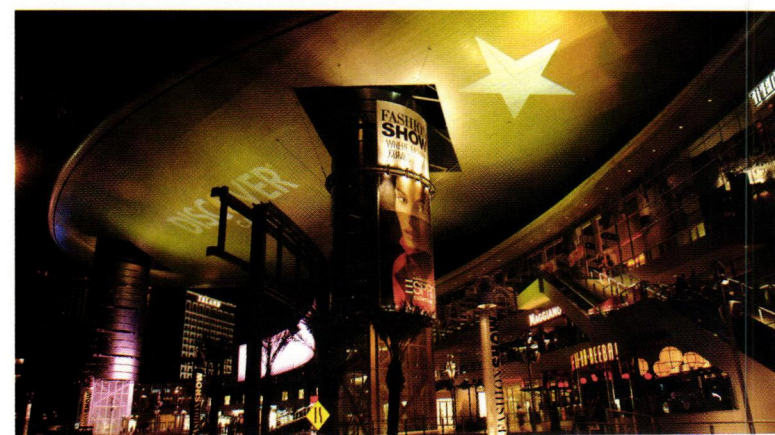
## NEON MUSEUM/BONEYARD

A nonprofit organization, the Neon Museum was established in 1997 to collect, restore, preserve and exhibit the city's most enduring and iconic symbols: neon signs. To date, the museum, which is awaiting a permanent home, has collected more than 100 signs, most from the Young Electric Sign Company (see Page 90), that date from the 1940s. Eleven of these treasures have been

fully restored and put on display at the Fremont Street Experience, including the Hacienda's horse and rider, the first Aladdin lamp and "Andy Anderson," the mascot for Anderson Dairy. Those signs still awaiting a second life—and rightful historical recognition—rest in a fenced-in, three-acre Downtown lot known as the Neon Boneyard, which the city established five years ago and the museum took over in 2002.

## SHOPPING AS ENTERTAINMENT

Shopping now has a starring role on the Las Vegas Strip as yet another entertainment attraction. The Forum Shops at Caesars Palace draws more than 20 million visitors annually, undergoing three expansions since its 1992 opening. The upscale Roman-themed mega-mall brings in 10 times more foot traffic than the



BONEYARD PHOTO BY KEVIN KEMNER; THE CLOUD PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FASHION SHOW



# Learning from Las Vegas

*It was more than a nice book title. Professor Jose Gamez assesses the work's influence on the urban design world*

Architectural writings rarely have an impact beyond the limits of the discipline. In fact, the flow of ideas tends to run in the opposite direction. More often than not, architecture is a field of study that imports ideas and theories from the outside rather than producing such things for export. However, this is not the case with *Learning from Las Vegas*, a book written by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour in 1972. *Learning from Las Vegas* has become one of the most memorable and influential architectural texts of the recent past; the book's appeal stems in part from its rhetorical style and its challenge to conventional notions of architectural value. For Venturi and his co-authors, to be revolutionary in architecture was not to reject history (as many early modern architects claimed). Rather, to be revolutionary was not only to be sympathetic to ordinary contemporary urban landscapes but also to learn from such places. The modernist rejection of historical precedent, for example, resulted in architecture's failure to communicate with a broad audience. Modern architecture, therefore, was a dominant but dead movement in the eyes of Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour precisely because it failed to learn from the vernacular world of everyday life.

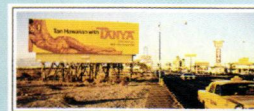
Their critique was based upon the premise that "main street was almost all right"—they argued that the commercial auto-oriented "strip" was a valid form of North American urbanism and, as such, it was to be placed on par with more conventional urban forms. In this sense, their claim that the Las Vegas Strip was akin to the Roman plaza was both intentionally outrageous and unexpectedly insightful. It was outrageous in the sense that the model of the European plaza was one of architecture's most cherished types of urban public space; thus, by putting the Strip on par with the plaza, conventional measures of good urban spaces were turned upside down. Their comparison was insightful in the sense that the commercial strip had replaced (for better or for worse) conventional public space in the post-World War II American landscape. Given this context, the Las Vegas Strip represented for Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour the commercial strip par excellence; it was a space dominated not by architecture but by signs and images—without which, the authors claimed, there would be no distinctive sense of

place. Architecture, therefore, took a backseat to the billboard (so to speak), and this observation gave rise to their terms the "decorated shed" (a building with applied signage) and the "duck" (a building expressive of its function).

Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour's analysis of the Las Vegas Strip, framed as an unbiased investigation of contemporary architectural forms, has drawn criticism for having overlooked the consequences of what we now often call suburban sprawl. In part, this criticism stemmed from the method of analysis promoted in the book, which was developed in a design studio that Venturi and Scott-Brown taught at Yale in 1968 with the help of Izenour. The class itself did not question the values found within Las Vegas or the commercial strip but focused upon the environment as one produced by a unique American sensibility, regardless of the underlying causes.

To many, Venturi and his colleagues were often seen as apologists for commercially driven urban development or the blind promotion of kitsch. On the other hand, much of the work of the internationally acclaimed Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, who designed the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in the Venetian, has been influenced by Venturi and his colleagues. More importantly, the critique established in *Learning from Las Vegas* has been cited not only in recent studies of Las Vegas but also in virtually every discussion of contemporary society. Geographers, sociologists, economists and cultural theorists have all written extensively about what Las Vegas represents, and *Learning from Las Vegas* figures prominently in many of these texts. In this sense, the book marked a turning point not only in architectural theory but also in general cultural thought—one that helped usher in the "Postmodern" era and one that put Las Vegas on the intellectual map permanently.

*Jose Gamez, a former professor at UNLV's School of Architecture, now teaches at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. While in Las Vegas, he led a studio that revisited Learning from Las Vegas in order to better understand the changes facing the contemporary postmodern city.*



## LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

Revised Edition

Robert Venturi Denise Scott Brown Steven Izenour



# Concepts

largest showroom. Retail offerings have since become a standard complement among Strip venues, including Bellagio, the Grand Canal Shoppes at the Venetian and Desert Passage at the Aladdin. The Rouse Company's recent Fashion Show expansion ratcheted retail entertainment to the next level with multimedia shows, a massive dining patio and an outdoor Cloud structure that doubles as a streaming video screen.

## THE MEGARESORT

When Kirk Kerkorian's monolithic International Hotel opened in 1969, it changed the anatomy of the Las Vegas resort forever. The 30-story, 1,512-room International was the world's largest hotel. It was also the first true "megaresort." The \$60 million ultra-opulent International featured gaming, swimming, handball, tennis and a 2,000-seat showroom



Martin Stern's drawing of the International, the first megaresort.

with superstars such as Elvis Presley performing nightly. Its extravagance was only topped after Kerkorian built the \$107 million, 2,084-room MGM Grand (now Bally's). A wave of lavish high-rise megaresorts has since developed along the Strip, each surpassing the other in outrageous luxury and must-have amenities. The megaresort is now synonymous with Las Vegas, defining the city's image for millions of visitors worldwide.

## GATES & WALLS

As recently as the 1980s, only the elite—think Rancho Circle and Wayne Newton's Casa de Shenandoah—felt it necessary to construct walls and gates to insulate themselves from the masses. Today, high walls and guard gates are the hallmarks of communities for most everyone—from young families to retired couples—opting to live in a semi state of seclusion. Of course, we are not alone in the Southwest, but there's little doubt that we've popularized the art. Consider: Of the 1,452 model homes offered for sale in the Valley as of late last year, more than one-third (548) were within gated neighborhoods. From an architecture standpoint, these gates and walls have added another aesthetic twist to a community's identity. But has it come at the expense of our togetherness?

## IMPORTED LANDSCAPE

How many palm trees has Las Vegas imported over the years? Half a million? "That's a conservative estimate," says Jim Johnson of Star Nursery. He suggests using the figure "hundreds of thousands." It's pretty hard to count, given that they're coming in by the truckload from Southern California every day. And you've got to think that there's at least as many transplanted palms as there are people—about 8,000 a month. Then consider that all of the major resorts have them—Mandalay Bay alone has 5,300—not to mention every business center and corner gas station and apartment complex pool. We could be well over a million, easy. Anyway, the point is that, ever since Bugsy planted palms at the Flamingo and declared it an oasis, few design elements have altered our landscape as much as these tropical beauties. What place on Earth has so fully and purposely transformed itself using living elements—not counting humans—taken from another? If this is against Mother Nature's intent, we won't soon know. But the hardy plants do thrive here, don't use too much water and certain local experts will even defend the Mexican fan palm as being indigenous. Besides, it's not like California invented them.

## MONORAIL

The Las Vegas Monorail is a futuristic, space-age mode of travel come to life. The 4.2-mile-long elevated track connects eight megaresorts, from the MGM Grand to the Sahara. It eliminates millions of automobile trips and harmful car emissions along the resort corridor. The sleek trains whisk visitors along in a noiseless, environmentally safe and scenic trip. The monorail has become a Strip attraction in its own right, while representing the future of public transportation. ✿



## EL CORTEZ

Built Downtown by LA masonry contractor Marion Hicks at a cost of \$245,000, the El Cortez opened in 1941 as Las Vegas' first major resort. In 1946, Bugsy Siegel bought into it and Wayne McAllister led the redesign. Its Spanish stylings, which occupied an entire block, contrasted sharply with existing edifices—mortar weeping from brick walls, red-tile roof with chimneys and gables and Moorish-arched arcade. Under the care of longtime owner Jackie Gaughan, today the exterior of the El Cortez stands, according to architecture critic Alan Hess, as "a rare intact piece of early history proclaiming Las Vegas' discovery by outsiders as a gambling mecca."

## THE FREMONT

The Strip's class and style hit Downtown with the opening of the \$6 million Fremont during Helldorado days in 1956. Owners Lou Lurie, a San Francisco hotelier, and Ed Levinson, a Chicago gambler, hired LA's Wayne McAllister and partner William Wagner to design the pink and reddish-tan California modern 15-story structure. The first-floor horizontal public space was topped by a

tower of modular rooms comprised of interlocking concrete panels. The Fremont was the highest building in Nevada, and the first resort Downtown to feature big-name entertainment and to bring in a world-class chef for gourmet dining.

## THE FLAMINGO

LA came to Vegas with the 1946 opening of the Flamingo on the Los Angeles Highway south of town. Bugsy Siegel and Billy Wilkerson hired George Vernon Russell to bring his Sunset Strip club designs to the desert—and Del Webb from Phoenix to build the upscale motor hotel. The building, modern with strong horizontal lines and the use of natural materials (brick, stone, glass, copper), was Step One in Vegas' transition from western saloon/gambling town to full-scale resort city with designs

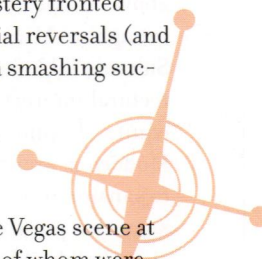
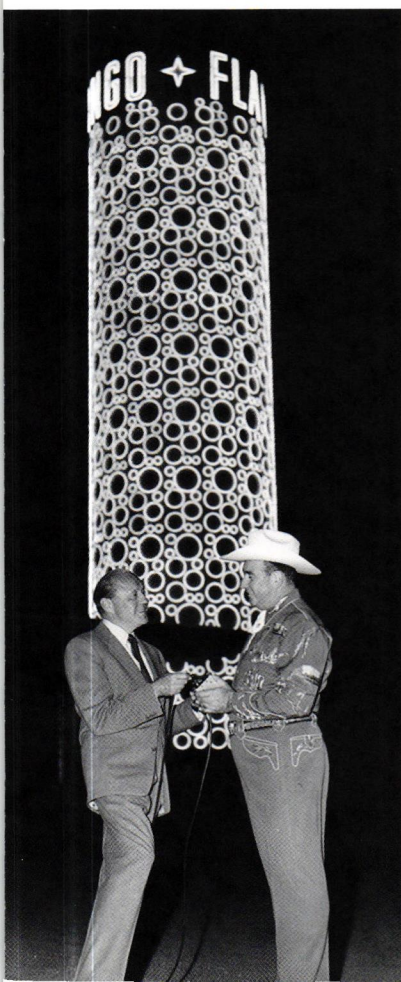


Two Strip legends: the ultramodern Sands (above) and the trailblazing Flamingo (left, pictured with another type of legend, Jack Benny).

reaching beyond the desert environment. The LA elite were drawn by upscale gaming and entertainment, and by resort amenities such as the health club, tennis and handball courts, stables, trapshooting, swimming pool, shops and a nine-hole golf course. Inside the \$6 million project, pink leather upholstery fronted green stone and banana leaf wallpaper. After initial reversals (and Bugsy's murder), Gus Greenbaum turned it into a smashing success.

## THE SANDS

LA architect Wayne McAllister reappeared on the Vegas scene at the behest of a group of Eastern investors (some of whom were denied licenses) to produce the elegantly ultramodern Sands. It opened in 1952 with its siren-call sign an obvious part of the project's overall design, and not looking like a flashing afterthought—a first for Vegas. The concrete slab of its pylon tied visually with the three pylons of the nearby modern porte cochere. YESCO produced the neon script (led by a 36-foot "S") that rode on a see-through grid against the desert sky.





# Casinos



Coast-to-coast themes, from the East (above) to the Old West (below).

## THE DUNES

Backed by Teamsters money and designed by Robert Dorr Jr. and John Repogle, the "Miracle in the Desert" opened in 1955. The Arabian themed resort (30-foot YESCO fiberglass sultan above, Magic Carpet Review within) staggered until Major Riddle brought in Minsky's bare-breasted *Follies* (a first for Vegas), the Sultan's Table buffet and an 18-hole golf course. Of greater architectural interest was 21-story diamond-shaped-with-inset-balconies "Diamond of the Dunes" addition drawn by noted Chicago Modernist architect Milton Schwartz. The Schwartzian Dunes' expansion in 1964 included a twin-spired sculpted-concrete signature porte cochere and the Dome of the Sea, a freestanding clamshell building wherein diners were suspended above a pool and entertained by a harpist cruising the waters on a seashell.

## DESERT INN

The cactus and cloud sign above the \$3.5 million, 225-room resort proclaimed "Wilbur Clark's Desert Inn"—though Moe Dalitz owned 75 percent when it opened in 1950. But Clark's brainchild, based on the Palm Springs hotel by that name, was given life by architects Wayne McAllister and Hugh Taylor. The

low cinderblock-trimmed-with-sandstone-veneer buildings were finished in pink with green accents. A signature three-story weeping-mortar brick tower held the Sky Room nightclub—its three sides of glass affording panoramic views of the valley and mountains. Interior designer Jac Lessman detailed the "modern western" stylings: casual furnishings against desert stone and redwood. Events such as the annual Tournament of Champions golf competition lured celebrities and Hollywood types up the circular drive past the fountain with its 60-foot-high spray.

## THE LANDMARK

Built over eight years, with revisions due to competition and funding problems, the Landmark finally opened in 1969 under the aegis of new owner Howard Hughes. Designed by Edward Hendricks of LA, it was intended to be the tallest Vegas building and to open a new front on Paradise Road. It succeeded in being the most inventively shaped, whether it resembled a Cape Canaveral gantry, an atomic blast or simply a mushroom. The main concrete structure was cylindrical with pie-shaped guest rooms, and the cap, at 31 stories, held a domed nightclub and casino.

## CAESARS PALACE

Jay Sarno is long gone, but Caesars Palace keeps going and going—and building. In the age of the theme, Caesars hit it excessively big. Directing Miami architect Melvin Grossman, and held partially in check by designer Jo Harris, Sarno opened in 1966 with a three-day party for 1,400 of his nearest and dearest. The \$25 million classical melange they witnessed included: fountains and Italian cypress and repro statuary filling the long setback from the Boulevard, a front façade of concrete "filigree" concealing the hotel windows, a dim reception area opening into the bright rotunda of tables and slots, and this in turn opening to the rear courtyard with pool, the 1,200-seat Circus Maximus, and the gastro-indulgent Bacchanal. And, everywhere, tons of Italian marble, statuary, toga'd employees and ovals.





### NEW YORK-NEW YORK

The opening of New York-New York in 1997 broke the mold of the tri-wing hotel, prominent here since 1969, by raising several towers from the same base in emulation of New York City's skyline (fortuitously, they did not include the World Trade Center towers). Architect Neal Gaskin and interior designers Yates Silverman produced the 49-story, \$350 million, 2,119-room resort. The interior harbors Times Square and the New York Stock Exchange, while outside, across the Brooklyn Bridge, one-third-size replicas include the Empire State Building and Statue of Liberty. Crisscrossing the facade, throwing off the scale, roars a real-life roller coaster.

### THE MIRAGE

November 22, 1989, was one of the major turning points in Las Vegas history. A 3,049-room, \$630 million hotel-casino called the Mirage opened that day on the Strip. Designed by Joel Bergman of Bergman, Walls & Associates along with theme specialist Atlandia Design and constructed by Marnell Corrao, the glistening gold-and-white, 29-story tri-wing boasted a white tiger habitat, headliners named Siegfried & Roy, a dolphin pool, a tropical swimming pool with water-fall, a 20,000-gallon aquarium behind the registration desk and a streetside volcano spewing fire and water every 15 minutes. Its inviting Polynesian-themed interior and many nongaming attractions launched the era of family-friendly Vegas, while its opulent rooms, fine dining and grand casino upped the luxury ante on the Strip. Perhaps most significantly on that day, Steve Wynn, known theretofore as the owner of the Golden Nugget, had laid the foundation for a new title: dream builder.

### BELLAGIO

When Steve Wynn opened Bellagio in 1998, its \$1.6 billion price tag made it the most expensive resort ever constructed. Designed by DeRuyter Butler with Atlandia Design and Jon Jerde Partnership, and built by Marnell Corrao (also the architect of record), the 36-story, tri-wing main building, fronted by a ground level Italian village, toppled the standard of luxury on the Strip and showcased world-class restaurants. The name and design, which represent the Old World wealth and splendor of the famous resort city, blend with marvels of modern technology. A few of the Strip firsts: the old masters art gallery, the lake on the boulevard and the choreographed fountain show. ❀

Bellagio's lobby, starring a Chihuly light fixture.





# Casino Elements

## THE MINT FACADE

This audacious pink-and-white masterpiece was the sign of its time Downtown, blasting Vegas' fading Old West aesthetic into a brand-new state of mind in 1957. Designed by Hermon Boernge, Kermit Wayne and other Young Electric Sign designers through collaboration with the hotel's architects, Zick and Sharp, the Mint's "eyebrow"-shaped façade arched over the entrance and was intersected by an undulating ribbon that carried the street-level logo.

But then the genius kicked in: This bit of architecture spontaneously burst skyward to form the vertical main sign (a la Googie's Coffee Shop in LA), 82 feet off the ground and topped by a 16-foot star. This neon queen of the Fremont night reigned for 30 years, until the Horseshoe swallowed the Mint to accommodate its expansion.



Streetscapes from two different eras: the Mint (above) and the Mirage (below).

a shimmering blue basin, sunglasses glinting in the sun, smiles saying, *Wish you were here*. In the postwar years, Vegas' image as a sunny oasis was central to its allure, and Strip resorts were built around the pool. The Vegas mystique had a bit of Beverly Hills to it, and even more of Palm Springs. Even as hotels grew and patrons were encouraged to stay in the casino, swimming-pool culture survived, from the Tropicana's "Island of Las Vegas," with its swim-up gaming coves, to the wave pool of Mandalay Bay, to the Hard Rock's "Beach" and its bronzed girls and guys. Some things never change.

## MGM GRAND PORTE COCHERE

When Kirk Kerkorian opened the world's largest resort hotel in 1973, he also initiated a new look for major resorts—the grand porte cochere. Big: 100 by 300 feet with eight traffic lanes. Bright: lights in large reflective plastic coffers along the perimeter producing movie marquee brilliance. And the MGM's porte cochere was the first, says critic Alan Hess, that "replaced the road sign in projecting the primary imagery of a Strip hotel."

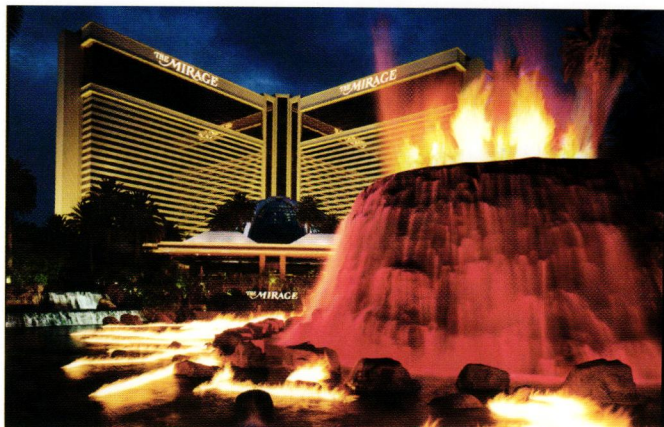
## SHOWROOMS

The Vegas era of live entertainment in an intimate venue began with the Strip's first resort. The jewel of the El Rancho, which opened in 1941, was the Opera House Showroom, a rustic, 300-seat

theater with wagon-wheel chandeliers. The first show was a chorus-line production starring Frank Fay and the scantily clad "El Rancho Starlets," and the nightly revue served as a blueprint for such legendary venues as the Crystal Room at the Desert Inn and the Copa Room at the Sands. From the start, Vegas showrooms attracted a who's who of superstar headliners, including Betty Grable, Louis Prima, Pearl Bailey, Liberace and, of course, the Rat Pack and Elvis. Eventually, the concept expanded to include lavish production shows such as *Lido de Paris* and *Folies Bergere*. By the time the city's 100 birthday approached, expansive state-of-the-art technological theaters that more resembled concert halls became the norm and the traditional song-and-dance show took a back seat to elaborate multimillion-dollar productions by such acts as Siegfried & Roy and Cirque du Soleil, whose newly opened Ka showroom—its fourth in Las Vegas—at the MGM Grand is one of the most elaborate high-tech stages in the world.

## THE MIRAGE VOLCANO

It's the mid 1980s, and Steve Wynn and his Mirage design team have gathered to discuss what to do with the three acres of prime real estate that abut Las Vegas Boulevard. You can hear the fingers tapping on the conference room table, the head-scratching, the brain-storming ... "I got it," somebody finally blurts out. "Let's build a fake volcano—one that's, say, about 50 feet tall and circulates 119,000 gallons of water per minute—and stick it in the middle of a manmade lagoon. And every 15 minutes from 7 p.m. to midnight, we'll have the volcano erupt, shooting smoke and flames 100 feet above the lagoon's surface. We'll even allow pedestrians walking along the Strip to get so close to it that they'll be able to feel the heat radiating from the fire. And—get this—we won't charge a penny for it!" Everyone in the room cringes, waiting for Wynn to snap and throw the crackpot out of the room. Instead ... the era of free entertainment along the Strip is born. Soon after, there was a nightly pirate battle next door at Wynn's Treasure Island, and later, down the street at his Bellagio, dancing water fountains. It all resulted in the one thing that was desperately needed: a more pedestrian-friendly Las Vegas Boulevard.





## ART IN CASINOS

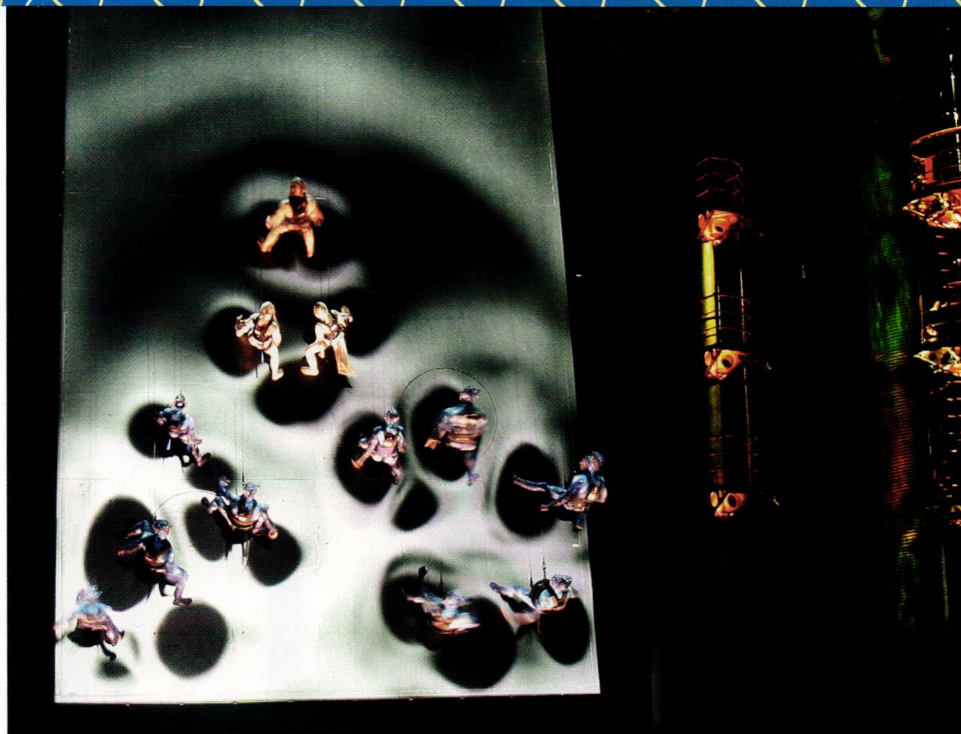
Erasing Vegas' outside reputation as a shameless capital of all things tacky, glitzy and Liberace might take another 100 years. Possibly the biggest step in toning it down some, however, came with Steve Wynn's idea to mix high art and casinos. In the land of themes, not only did he open a restaurant called Picasso and hung real Picassos in it, but his Bellagio megaresort broke major cultural ground with its Gallery of Fine Art in 1998. It turned out to be more than just a Strip novelty or tax-friendly way for Wynn to show off masterpieces; it was the start of a movement. Today, three fine-art galleries hold their own next to the clanking on Las Vegas Boulevard. Besides Bellagio's, there is the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in the Venetian and Wynn's current collection at his new megaresort. And here's the trickle-down: If you look closely at the walls of many properties today, from the Rio to THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, you'll see some real art as well.

## CEILINGS

Gamble inside Monte Carlo's casino under massive, glimmering chandeliers. Shop indoors at Caesars Palace or Paris or the Venetian under bright-blue skies with patches of puffy clouds. Check into Bellagio under Dale Chihuly's three-dimensional, 18-foot-high, 70-by-30-foot sculpture of multihued, blown-glass flower petals—or into the Venetian under magnificent replicas of four fresco painting by artists of the 17th and 18th centuries. Dine inside Mix atop Mandalay Bay's THEhotel under a futuristic bubble chandelier. And on and on. Clearly, unlike anywhere else, when it comes to elaborate overhead design in Las Vegas, there is no ceiling.

## ULTRALOUNGE

It's the Vegas way of life: Identify an existing, proven concept, then take it to the next level. Perhaps nowhere is this formula used more than with the Vegas lounge experience, which has metamorphosed from smoky, live music outposts in casinos to a more nightclub-like setting to the latest and greatest concept: the ultralounge. In 2003, when Tabu at MCM Grand opened, this sleek, sexy and decidedly hip species of lounge quickly became the ultimate place to see and be seen in Sin City. Moreover, these very-late-night hot spots have allowed architects and interior designers to spread their professional wings and, as a result, whisk Las Vegas nightlife deep into the 21st century. From Tabu to Ghostbar at the Palms to Curve at the Aladdin, the dozen or so ultralounges that dot the city all offer unique elements of upscale décor, lighting, plush seating and appointments. The intended goal of the beautiful look? To attract the beautiful people, of course. So far, so good.



The 80,000-pound, hydraulic Kà stage at the MGM Grand.

## DESIGNER RESTAURANTS

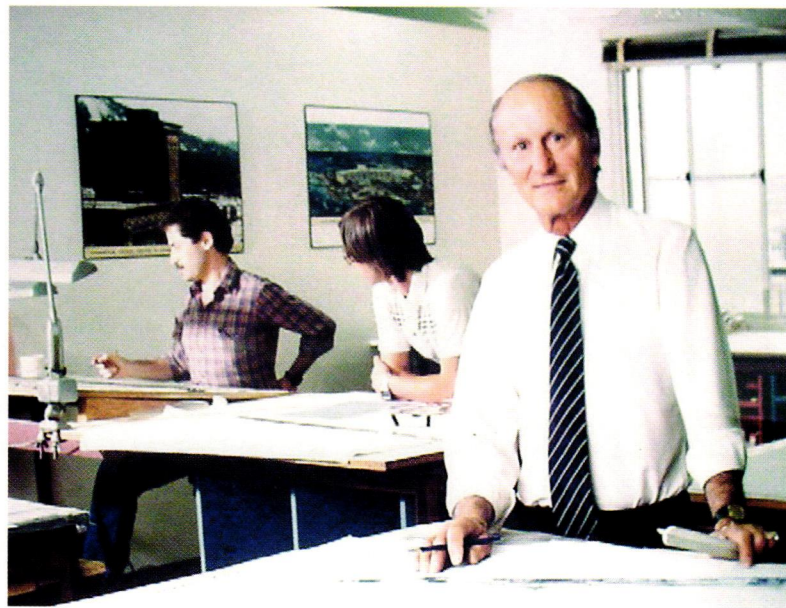
Once the celebrity chef era had dawned, megaresort bigwigs spared no expense on the design of these new culinary meccas. With hired guns such as Adam Tihany, Tony Chi and Jeffrey Beers, "restaurant as theater" became yet another part of the Vegas experience. The drama unfolded from the minute you stepped inside such showplaces as the Chi-designed Nobhill (MGM Grand), the Tihany-inspired Aureole (Mandalay Bay) and the redesigned Olives by Beers (Bellagio). Top designers have even re-imagined a Vegas classic, the buffet, with Beers serving up Dishes at the TI and Tihany dishing out Cravings at the Mirage.

## RESTROOMS

In any other city, public restrooms are an afterthought. In Las Vegas, they're virtual works of art. Take the commodes at the Jeffery Beers-designed China Grill inside Mandalay Bay: The 11 futuristic, unisex glass enclosures that feature televisions and translucent walls—shadows are visible to passersby—have been talked and written about as much as any dish served inside the restaurant. Then there's that men's room at Main Street Station downtown where the urinals are held up by a three-ton, graffiti-covered slab of the fallen Berlin Wall. It's not just decorative ambience that has turned a trip to the public restroom into an experience, either. Over at Mix, the new restaurant and lounge at the top of THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, the bathrooms are designed so you can do your business while enjoying a panoramic view of the city ... from 43 stories up! If nothing else, our attention to washroom details proves one thing: When it comes to design in Las Vegas, even the littlest things are big. ✨



# Architects



Martin Stern Jr., one of the Strip's boldest designers.

## **JULIO LUCCHESI, AIA EMERITUS**

He moved here in the early 1950s as an associate for architect Vernon Welborn. The two performed major casino expansions and renovations for the Desert Inn, Frontier, Silver Slipper, Golden Nugget and Thunderbird. Lucchesi helped form AIA Las Vegas and played a key role in creating UNLV's School of Architecture. He designed the Henderson Telephone Building in 1955—the area's first post-tensioned concrete structure. The now common construction method requires fewer supporting columns, freeing up interior spaces for myriad design possibilities. Lucchesi, who eventually began his own practice, also designed Las Vegas' first library, the one near City Hall.

## **JESS HOLMES, FAIA**

This principal of Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini is one of only four Nevadans named to the AIA College of Fellows. Holmes was the first Las Vegas to serve on the board of the AIA Western Mountain Region, and his practice was also the first to receive the AIA Nevada Firm of the Year Award. Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini has completed nearly 3,000 projects, earning more than 75 design awards, since its 1984 founding. The firm's buildings, which include Henderson's Multigenerational Center and UNLV's Thomas Beam Music Center, reflect a rational design approach to create functional, uplifting architecture that responds to people, place and time.

## **MARTIN STERN JR.**

The man whose bold designs gave shape to the Las Vegas Strip first came here in 1953 to draw an addition for the Sahara. At that time the Strip consisted mostly of low-rise casinos surrounding outdoor pools. But that was about to change. Stern designed the Sahara's first skyscraper (14 stories) in 1959, followed by a high-rise addition for the Sands, signaling the start of a brave new skyline. In the same period, Stern also lifted Downtown skyward with a 26-story building for the Mint. Later, he helped give birth to the city's first megaresort: the tri-wing International (now the Las Vegas Hilton). The last of Stern's Strip monuments was the MGM Grand Hotel in 1971 (now Bally's), though he continued to do redesigns and expansions for the Sahara, Riviera and El Rancho hotels well into the 1980s. He retired in 1996, and before his death five years later at age 84, he donated more than 600 sets of drawings and plans to UNLV's Special Collections. One of his most innovative drawings was the Xanadu, commissioned by Donald Trump and scheduled for the southwest corner of Tropicana and the Strip. His futuristic-looking complex called for a vast atrium and step-back rooms. However, Trump's financing fell through, and Excalibur stands where Xanadu would have been built.

## **A. LACY WORSWICK**

In 1929, the San Francisco architect moved to Las Vegas, where his firm designed many of the city's important buildings, including the Spanish revival Stephen R. Whitehead house at 333 N. Seventh St., which is listed in the state historic register. In 1932, he designed the 100-room Apache hotel, which later joined with the Eldorado to form Binion's Horseshoe. While a member of the city planning commission, Worswick tried to limit building heights, arguing that anything higher than three stories wasn't in keeping with our natural environment. He preferred Mission-style architecture for its simplicity and grace, as well as its suitability for our climate.

## **ROBERT FIELDEN, FAIA**

A principal of RAFI: Planning, Architecture, Urban Design, he is one of only three architects ever elected to serve on the national boards for the American Institute of Architects, National Architectural Accreditation Board and National Council of Architectural Registration Board. He was also the first recipient of the Nevada Society of Architects highest honor, the Silver Medal, and is a member of the AIA College of Fellows. Fielden, a past chairman of the state Board of Architecture, helped establish the UNLV School of Architecture and serves as a UNLV graduate faculty member. His intellectual curiosity and innovative designs have resulted in a diverse architectural portfolio, ranging from CCSN's Charleston Campus to Summerlin's Performing Arts Center.



BY AMY SCHMIDT

## Tony Marnell

*What Steve Wynn dreamed, the king of design-build made happen*

**“W**e’ve now all confirmed why God builds mountains,” says Tony Marnell, smirking. It’s November, and the builder is relating the challenges of constructing the manmade mountain in front of Wynn Las Vegas.

Aside from God, though, whom else could Steve Wynn have called upon to build his mountain other than the man who had delivered volcanoes, pirate ships and dancing waters to him before? Only Marnell, who has been sitting at the right hand of Wynn since the Las Vegas Strip’s renaissance began.

This new mountain of a project, the \$2.5 billion, 5-million-square-foot Wynn megaresort, is Marnell Corrao Associates’ biggest feat ever—and one that will no doubt serve to heighten both Strip barons’ reputations as innovators. It will also permanently carve Marnell’s legacy into the world-famous landscape.

“It’s all to Mr. Wynn’s credit and the challenges that he puts in front of himself,” Marnell says. “We have been fortunate to face those challenges with him.”

Wynn’s been lucky, too.

Marnell Corrao Associates, led by CEO and Chairman of the Board Tony Marnell, is the premier design-build firm in the business, with 1,500 people and an array of services, including architecture, construction, interiors, master planning, consulting and development. Marnell Corrao has constructed or remodeled some of the Strip’s most important properties—the Mirage, Treasure Island, Bellagio, Excalibur, New York-New York, MGM Grand, the Forum Shops at Caesars.

Another reason Marnell Corrao has blossomed into a billion-dollar-a-year business is its ability to keep the focus when the chips are down. In the aftermath of 9/11, when most firms pulled back, Marnell Corrao built luxurious corporate offices near McCarran International Airport as well as an upscale Italian restaurant and deli (Panevino), and created two more arms—Marnell Properties and Marnell Construction. By 2003, revenues had tripled.

“There is always a thirst, a hunger to do better,” Marnell says.

He inherited that appetite from his father, who came to Las Vegas for the same reason Tony has stayed—it’s the land of infinite opportunity.



**B**orn in Riverside, California, to a bricklayer and a homemaker from Italy, a three-year-old Tony moved to Las Vegas when his pop was named masonry supervisor at the Sands in 1951. He grew up in North Las Vegas, catching the Rat Pack on Saturday nights and church on Sunday mornings.

Father had son work construction sites during the summer. Young Tony soon found himself reading plans and then working on those buildings, “fascinated by seeing sheets of paper evolve into three-dimensional structures, spaces and environments,” he recalls. “By the time I was 16, I knew I wanted to be an architect.”

After receiving his bachelor’s in architecture from USC in 1972, he returned to Las Vegas as apprentice at Moffitt & McDaniel. After a year, he earned his architecture license, but instead of getting a gig with a firm, Marnell spent the next year working for a general contractor, rekindling a lot of old associations.

“I just could not get building out of my system,” Marnell recalls. “I thought, ‘I know how to build my own buildings.’” So rather than draw up blueprints only to pass them off to someone else to construct, he devised a plan to do both—a practice unheard of at the time and practiced by few architecture firms today, Marnell says.

In 1974, he opened a Las Vegas *continued on page 110*





# Architects

## WALTER ZICK, AIA, AND HARRIS SHARP, AIA

These two men wielded an unparalleled influence over Las Vegas architecture for four decades. From 1950 to 1987, the duo practiced under the name Zick & Sharp Architects, designing everything from casinos to schools. The firm, known for its modern, cutting-edge designs, was responsible for the Foley Federal Building and the late-gothic-revival Little Church of the West, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. AIA Nevada recognized both men with special lifetime achievement awards in 1999.

## WAYNE MCALLISTER

He designed the city's first themed hotel, the El Rancho, in 1941. It lassoed high-rollers with its chuck-wagon murals, rambling bungalows and cowpoke casino. Bugsy Siegel turned to McAllister to renovate his first Vegas casino, the El Cortez. McAllister designed the Desert Inn and Sands, home of the Rat Pack, as well as the Fremont and Horseshoe. He was also responsible for several Bob's Big Boy restaurants, which were praised for their whimsical car-inspired architecture. McAllister died in 2000 at age 92.

## JOEL BERGMAN, AIA

As Steve Wynn's in-house architect for 16 years, he created richly detailed landmark projects such as the Mirage and Treasure Island that transformed Las Vegas from a cheap buffet town into a diversified tourism powerhouse. In 1994, he joined co-worker Scott Walls to form Bergman, Walls & Associates, an architecture firm specializing in hospitality design. Today Bergman's buildings, including Paris Las Vegas, lie at the heart of the Strip. He continues to reshape the city with fresh undertakings, such as Donald Trump's proposed hotel-condo tower across the street from Wynn Las Vegas.

## GEORGE TATE, AIA

George Tate, the founder of Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects, practiced in Las Vegas for more than 40 years, serving as principal-in-charge on such projects as UNLV's Alta Ham Fine Arts Building and Beam Engineering Complex. As a part-time instructor in the engineering department, he was instrumental in the formation of UNLV's School of Architecture and the development of its curriculum. Tate's best projects reflect his love of the community and its history in bright, creative designs that are sensitive toward their users.

## WILLIAM SNYDER, FAIA

The president of Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects is one of only four Nevadans named to the AIA College of Fellows. His modern design aesthetic and innovative responsiveness to the desert



Five design legends, circa 1974: (back row) Robert Fielden, Harris Sharp and Thomas Turner; (front row) Walter Zick and Jack Miller.

environment resulted in the practice being named the AIA Western Mountain Region Architectural Firm of the Year in 1998. Snyder additionally serves as chairman of the Community College of Southern Nevada Foundation and on the State Architecture Board. His innovative work for the Clark County School District led them to give an elementary school his name in 2001.

## JOHN KLAJ, AIA, AND DAN JUBA, AIA

Both helped shape the Strip while with Marnell Corrao Associates. Since forming Klai Juba Architects in 1995, they have produced some of Las Vegas' most-popular hospitality projects, including Mandalay Bay. Klai Juba's continued excellence garnered it the AIA Nevada's 2004 Architecture Firm of the Year award. The firm also sponsors a popular lecture series at the UNLV School of Architecture, drawing visits from top national and international architects, authors and educators.

## JACK MILLER, AIA

He designed some of our most well-known buildings, including UNLV's life science building, several additions at the Las Vegas Convention Center, and the Downtown Centel and Nevada Power Company buildings. He founded Jack Miller and Associates, now JMA Architecture Studios, and turned over the practice to Tom Schoeman, Ed Vance and Rex Evans in 1988. His diverse designs provide a modern architectural response to the desert, emphasizing light and air. Miller died in 1999 at age 84. ✿



## HANK GREENSPUN

Newspaper publishers always have the opportunity to shape their community, but few have done it in as literal a sense as Hank Greenspun. He had the gift of vision, and somehow—even in the early 1950s, it seems—he knew that big things were in store for this dusty little town. In his *Las Vegas Sun* editorials he called for the maturation and normalization of the city—and he championed those whom, like Howard Hughes, he believed could hasten the process. Perhaps most notable, though, was his purchase of vast tracts of land at Henderson's edge and his decision to develop the property not in the willy-nilly manner of townships like Winchester and Paradise, but as the master-planned community of Green Valley.

## DEL WEBB

In a city primed to go vertical, one of the first builders to do it was a guy whose name is most commonly connected with senior-citizen golf-course communities. But long before Sun City came to Summerlin and Henderson, Del Webb owned the Sahara Hotel, and in 1966 he asked his architect, Martin Stern Jr., to build a tower 14 stories high. It was one of the city's first high rises (the Riviera was the first on the Strip, with 11 stories), pioneering the way for a street full of them. After achieving prominence as a builder in Phoenix, Webb had first come to the Valley in the mid-'40s to complete Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo Hotel. This undertaking, of course, required fearlessness, confidence and competence, traits that would serve Webb well as he helped redefine both the Nevada resort industry and the residential southwest. Today, more than three decades after his death, the company that bears his name still has an uncanny knack for making bold moves that somehow don't feel like gambles at all. A country club development in the Henderson foothills that requires \$250 million in infrastructure before a single foundation is poured? No problem. Somewhere, the tough old guy is smiling down on Anthem.

## IRWIN MOLASKY

If you grew up in Las Vegas in the 1960s and '70s, chances are you shopped at the Boulevard Mall, went to the movies at the neighboring Parkway Theatre and were dragged into Sunrise Hospital when you got sick. Maryland Parkway was the undisputed commercial centerpiece of residential Las Vegas. And it was that way thanks to Irwin Molasky. In the late 1950s, Molasky launched the Paradise Development Company—together with controversial Desert Inn boss Moe Dalitz, grocer Merv Adelson and casino executive Allard Roen. The team saw that the city's next resi-

dential boom would be southeast of the nascent Strip and chose Maryland Parkway as the region's Main Street. The hospital, built in 1959, was the company's first big job, and in the succeeding decades Molasky continued with projects on and around the Parkway that would shape the lives of a generation and point the way for future developers. His Las Vegas Country Club, developed in the early '60s, set an aspirational ideal—golf course living—whose echoes are evident today from Anthem to Summerlin. Another '60s project, the Regency Towers, was an extraordinary early vision of the "Manhattanization" that is only now taking hold in Las Vegas. It's no surprise that, with such projects as the Park Towers and the Bank of America Plaza, Molasky even today remains a key player in Las Vegas' transformation into a major urban center.

## BOB STUPAK

Would anyone else have built the Stratosphere Tower? One of the last freelancers to survive in Vegas' corporate age, Stupak was a gambler both financially and aesthetically. Long before he'd floated such audacious ideas as a casino in the shape of the Titanic, Stupak had built Vegas World on the northernmost end of the Strip and clad it with a massive mural of a spaceman hovering over Earth. The result was widely derided as a monstrosity, the result of a peculiar sort of exuberant tastelessness. As such, it was an appropriate conceptual cousin to the tower that went up in its place—a blocky, cartoonish and completely derivative structure that has become a civic symbol, one that more than a few of us are happy to see glowing in the distance, night after night, a reassuring note that even the new Vegas is still Vegas.



Bob Stupak with Zsa Zsa Gabor at the old Vegas World.



# People



Jay Sarno: a man of vision and appetite.

## ALAN HESS

As an architecture critic, Hess dared go where only a handful of Yalies had gone before him: He took Las Vegas seriously, and not just as a "problem" or a symbol of itself, but as a real place with a real aesthetic that had real roots. In tracing Las Vegas resort design to the coffee shop architecture of the LA '50s, Hess's *Viva Las Vegas: After Hours Architecture* gave the city a rightful and even dignified place in architectural history as the outsized stepson of Googie.

## RICHARD MOORE

Moore was an odd sort of academic administrator: He cared what his Community College of Southern Nevada campuses looked like, but he did more than wring his hands about it. The result was a colorful, energetic toyland aesthetic, visible at campuses across the Valley but perhaps most impressive at the West Charleston facility. Later, during his short-lived presidency of the new Nevada State College, Moore proposed something still more revolutionary: a college that looked like a college, complete with rationally laid-out lanes, Georgian structures and tree-lined vistas. They said it would never happen. And it won't.

## JAY SARNO

In 1997, Steven Millhauser won the Pulitzer Prize for a novel called *Martin Dressler: Tale of an American Dreamer*. In the book the industrious son of a turn-of-the-century cigar-store owner has the all-American ambition to do something big with his life—and the all-American neurosis of the big thing never being big enough. He goes into the business of building hotels, and builds each more grand, more ornate, more strange than the next, until it becomes clear that what he's doing is not designing reasonable, profitable lodging facilities but pouring his personal anxieties into towers of brick and stone—a habit that leads him first to spectacular success and then to spectacular failure. Las Vegas is, in a way, a city that could not possibly exist without its Martin Dresslers, and the most Dresslerian of all (if somewhat less prim in his personal habits) was Jay Sarno, father of the Las Vegas theme resort. In the late 1960s, Sarno imprinted first Caesars Palace and then Circus Circus with his own stupendous appetites and insecurities, playing both the imperious visionary and the gluttonous clown while building himself a palace and a big top. The seeds of Sarno's success and failure alike lay in his assumption that American travelers wanted the same things he did: As it turned out, American travelers were indeed eager to see themselves as Caesars, but less so to see themselves as clowns. Caesars Palace was a stunning success. But the initial vision of Circus Circus—the circus not as a wonderland for kids or even the kid in all of us, but as a cotton-candy nightmare of carnies and painted ladies and the strange and dangerous temptations they presented—was an unadulterated bomb (Bill Bennett rescued it from its studied seediness and turned it into a middle-class family attraction). The subconscious can make you rich, but it can ruin you, too. Though, who knows, 35 years later, as the city embraces its Id once more, it just might be that Circus Circus is ready to return its dark roots.

## CHARLES HUNSBERGER

As director of the Clark County Library District from the 1970s to the early '90s, Hunsberger had the shocking idea that a library, as a temple of culture, should look like a temple of culture. He recruited top architects—both locals and out-of-towners—and gave each of them enough freedom to create something fresh. For the Valley's residents, the program brought some lasting gifts, such as Welles Pugsley Architects' West Charleston Library, and some disappointments, such as Michael Graves' remodel of the Clark County Library on Flamingo. But the results were always interesting, and in off-Strip Las Vegas that was an accomplishment in itself. In the end, though, Hunsberger was tarred by the charge that he was building "Taj Mahals," and by 1993 he



# Howard Hughes

*The tycoon's enormous presence may have been his most enduring legacy*

In 1966, Hughes arrived in Las Vegas with his unrivaled bankroll and impressive résumé and put out the word that he was ready for a buy-in. He was a national celebrity—aviator, industrialist, preferred contractor of the U.S. Air Force—and his precarious mental health was kept just enough under wraps so that a nation of admirers could see him as a great American eccentric, an oddball superman who could be relied upon to get the job done. At the time, mob-dominated Las Vegas was the subject of intensely critical national media scrutiny and object of the gimlet-eyed gaze of federal investigators. Further, the gambling economy needed capital infusions beyond what even the slickest underworld financing could offer. The city's boosters saw in tycoon-hero Hughes a solution to all three problems.

While Hughes never became the expected civic cure-all, he did go on a hotel-buying spree that signaled to the "respectable" business world that Vegas was worth the investment. And within a year of his arrival, good clean corporate names like Hilton were ready to come to town. The problem was, while Hughes could buy on his own dime, corporations seeking to follow his lead needed to buy with stockholder dollars. This had never been done in Nevada, where the rules said that if a thousand stockholders bought a casino, every last one of them would need a background check and a license to run the place. Consequently,



led by Governor Paul Laxalt, the same men who had smoothed Hughes' entry into the casino business got the rules changed.

While the resulting Corporate Gaming Act of 1969 may have been an evolutionary inevitability, it was Hughes' arrival, with its enormous symbolic significance, that hastened it onto the agenda. And the Act, which Hughes neither called for nor benefited from, may be seen as his enduring legacy on the Strip. In the end, Hughes never built a thing on the Boulevard. After four years in a Desert Inn penthouse, the great recluse left town in 1970—a sort of desert Sasquatch, a giant no one had ever seen, a legend who'd left few physical traces. Today there is no Hotel Hughes, but the legalization of corporate casino ownership cleared the way for other companies to pour capital into Strip development—capital that created an avenue of palaces that the clubby and larcenous pre-Hughes operators may have dreamed of, but could never have begun to afford.

For an epilogue, see the Summerlin entry on Page 70.

was out of a job. The "damage" was done though, and throughout Southern Nevada, interesting architects continue to build interesting libraries while uninteresting bureaucrats shake their heads and mutter, uninterestingly, about taxpayer dollars and Mughal mausoleums.

## STEVE WYNN

He didn't invent the modern Vegas resort; he made it better. If Jay Sarno is generally considered the Columbus of Las Vegas casino themeing, then Wynn, with the Mirage and Treasure Island, most certainly became its Magellan. He brought entertainment out of the casino and onto the Strip; the resort themes

were active—they came right out and got you and ushered you into a world that was one part Vegas and two parts Somewhere Else. Now, having sold his old empire, Wynn appears ready to achieve a similar feat in reverse: A few years after the Maloof brothers brought something of a paradigm shift to town with the assiduously non-themed Palms, Wynn announced that his superproject on the Desert Inn site would not, after all, be called Le Reve; there would be no Europhile dream to follow up Bellagio, but rather a place called Wynn Las Vegas, whose great thematic hook is that Wynn is Las Vegas, and Las Vegas is Wynn—a branding of self as city and city as self, the culmination of a career built on fearless creativity, impeccable timing, and, lest we forget what's behind it all, a series of harrowing financial leaps of faith.





Two of YESCO's greatest "spectaculars" in progress: the Silver Slipper and Vegas Vic.

## YOUNG ELECTRIC SIGN COMPANY

Sixty years ago, the Salt Lake-based company acquired the Nevada Outdoor Sign Company and opened up a Vegas branch. The golden age of neon was under way. Over the next few years, YESCO created signs for the Eldorado, Golden Nugget and Las Vegas Club, igniting the golden age of neon and making a name—"Glitter Gulch"—for Downtown. In the 1950s, the team of neon artists designed some of Las Vegas' most fabulous signs: from the iconic 75-foot, 12,000-pound Vegas Vic in front of the Pioneer to trailblazing pieces for the Stardust, Silver Slipper and Mint properties. And they have always kept up with the times, creating memorable "spectaculars," as they call them, for every era, from the sultry coffee-shop modern Sands sign in the 1960s to the flashy Rio of the '90s.





## THE FEDS

In the beginning were the Feds, the lords of Nevada's land. And they're still at it: parceling out their property, constructing costly and attractive buildings, and employing a lot of Las Vegas. The economic impact has been huge. President Hoover, before his dam, had begun an extensive government building program, giving us the downtown post office. FDR and the New Deal added such projects as the War Memorial Building, City Park and a grade school at Fourth and Bridger. In the decade of the '30s, 70 million federal bucks found their way to Vegas. As Eugene Moehring points out in *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, the national government has also shaped the physical configuration of the city. The urban area was expanded: to the southeast through the dam, funding for Boulder Highway and the building of Basic Magnesium and the Basic townsite, giving birth to Henderson; to the northeast with the air gunnery school, then Nellis; northwest via the test site; southwest, and maybe most importantly because of the impact on Strip development and the tourism industry, through the widening and paving of Highway 91, the Los Angeles Highway, in the '30s, and its conversion to I-15 in the '70s. Finally, the government, which sold thousands of acres to Leigh Hunt for his postwar developments and to Howard Hughes for what is now Summerlin, continues to shape our metropolis with regular and extensive land auctions.

## THE MOB

The mob hit Vegas not long after gambling was legalized. In 1931, LA bootlegger and gambling operator Tony Cornero opened (in his brothers' names) the Meadows Club, an attractive mission-style nightclub on Boulder Highway. A decade later Bugsy sent Moe to convert the local race books to his wire service—and the race was on. Bugsy invested his profits in several local establishments and went on to build the Flamingo. The litany of figures, from Icepick to Lefty, is well-known; so are the establishments they built and ran: Dunes, Stardust, Flamingo, Riviera, Tropicana, Sands, Caesars. Skimming and tax-dodging, sure. But for three decades organized crime had a huge impact on the economy and structure of the booming community. They brought in celebrities and high rollers and built one classy joint after another. Major Riddle, Moe Dalitz and J.K. Houssels (of the Dunes, DI, Trop) got water rights and developed golf courses—picture Vegas today with no golf. Mob money, or contacts, provided financing for legitimate ventures when respectable lenders wouldn't touch the place: The Teamster pension fund also invested in numerous non-resort enterprises, including housing developments and Sunrise Hospital. The hotel-casino operators played a considerable role in local charities and civic institutions, contributing sizably, for

example, to the building of Temple Beth Shalom and Guardian Angel Cathedral. Gus Greenbaum served as chair of the Paradise town board and shepherded in streets, sewers and schools. The Gaming Control Board, then the Commission, then the Black Book dented the operations, and the mob era finally starting drifting to a close after the 1967 legislation that made it feasible for large corporations to hold gaming licenses.



Oscar Goodman, the mayor who'll do just about anything for Downtown.

## OSCAR GOODMAN

The mayor's Downtown efforts have been tireless: the Union Pacific tract, an arena and/or stadium for big-league sports, the Arts District, the Nightclub District. Though his legacy in the shaping of our city is left for future generations to judge, here's what the mayor believes it will be: "We are developing a city within a city, with a performing arts center, a cultural center and wonderful residential. When these projects come to fruition, Downtown will really be the heart and soul of the entire community." ❁



# Buildings

## D TERMINAL, MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The "D Gates" certainly achieved function when built in 1998, doubling the capacity of air travelers while creating a fluid environment for them to pass through. But what Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects did with the form earned them multiple AIA Nevada Design Awards and an AIA Western Mountain Region Award. Inside, weary travelers are greeted with a variety of distinct, upbeat and engaging experiences through the terminal's sequencing of spaces and special design features: the Great Hall's massive window wall, neon signage, a terrazzo map of Southern Nevada on the floor of the rotunda, concrete desert creatures that rise from it, regionally relevant murals by local artists. Factor in the interior's sleek and comforting nods to commercial aviation's golden age, and Vegas stands light years ahead of the many beat-up, pedestrian terminals in other cities. The same goes for the exterior, whose cutting-edge, retro-hip demeanor instantly tells visitors that there's a serious, efficient and sophisticated side to our adult playland.



The art moderne railroad station circa 1940.

## LA CONCHA MOTEL

Paul Williams, a prominent Los Angeles architect, was the first African-American to design a building for Vegas. The La Concha Motel office, built on the Strip in 1962, was futuristic, "googie," with sweeping curves and glass walls filling below a roofline, which in places arced nearly to the ground. Its designation by Preserve Nevada as one of the state's most endangered historical places has proven prescient.

## THE HUNTRIDGE THEATRE

Designed by the foremost theater architect of his time, Charles Lee of Los Angeles, the Huntridge Theatre served as the show-piece of Huntridge, master developer Leigh Hunt's wartime boomtown community. Little ornamentation bedecks the 1944 Moderne one-story brick and concrete structure, though a 75-foot fluted tower with signature porthole supports the neon nameplate. The building at Maryland and Charleston, which still hosts events, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

## DOWNTOWN POST OFFICE

The U.S. Federal Courthouse and Post Office on Stewart Avenue stands as an example of our Depression-era architecture, and as part of President Hoover's extensive building program, it signified the new, and large, federal presence here. Designed by James A. Wetmore of the Treasury Department in the Beaux-Arts classical style, the three-story steel-frame and brick building is clad with terra-cotta tiles and marked by large colonnades. The city has taken over this National Register landmark with intended use as a cultural center/museum. (This is the site where Mayor Goodman tried his first major case—and threw up on the stately steps.)

## GUARDIAN ANGEL CATHEDRAL

Triangles. The modern, geometric Guardian Angel Cathedral—attributed to LA architect Paul Williams (see La Concha)—stands in stark contrast to other Strip structures. Dedicated as a shrine in 1963 on land donated by the Desert Inn, parishioners and visitors are greeted by a freestanding spire—four elongated triangles, merged to resemble a rocket ship, bear a cross heavenward. The front elevation of the cathedral is dominated by a 1,600-square-foot mosaic—at the apex is the Eye of God with vision rays falling on the Guardian Angel. Within, massive rectilinear "pillars" triangulate to a height of 70 feet. The clean-lined structure is a carrier for the magnificent artwork of Hungarian refugee (to LA) sisters Isabel and Edith Piczek. Their "mystical realism" is further evidenced in the huge "Risen Christ" mural above the altar and in the 12 triangular stained-glass windows, most about 18 feet high. Of note is the south sanctuary window that, besides Harlequin and the masks of tragedy and comedy, depicts the atomic symbol and several Strip hotels of the '60s, including the Landmark, Hilton, Stardust and Sands. Reportedly, resort owners contributed heavily to the church; among the donors noted on the stained glass windows are Danny Thomas and Wilbur Clark.





The heaven- and Vegas-inspired window at Guardian Angel.

### RAILROAD DEPOTS

Soon after the railroad auctioned lots to form the new city, a splendid mission-style depot marked the entry point, setting Vegas' architectural tone until the Hoover Dam era. The building anchored Fremont Street, with stuccoed walls, terra-cotta roofing, sweeping arches, covered arcades and extensive landscaping around the broad circular driveway. In 1940, the venerable structure was replaced by an art moderne station. Arrivals on the five daily passenger trains that passed through each way were welcomed by the "first streamlined, completely air-conditioned railroad passenger station anywhere." High atop the aerodynamic tower rode the proud Union Pacific shield. The building reflected the new neon look and the promotion of Las Vegas as "Streamline City." Thirty years later, it was consigned to the trash heap, replaced by a nondescript area within the Union Plaza.

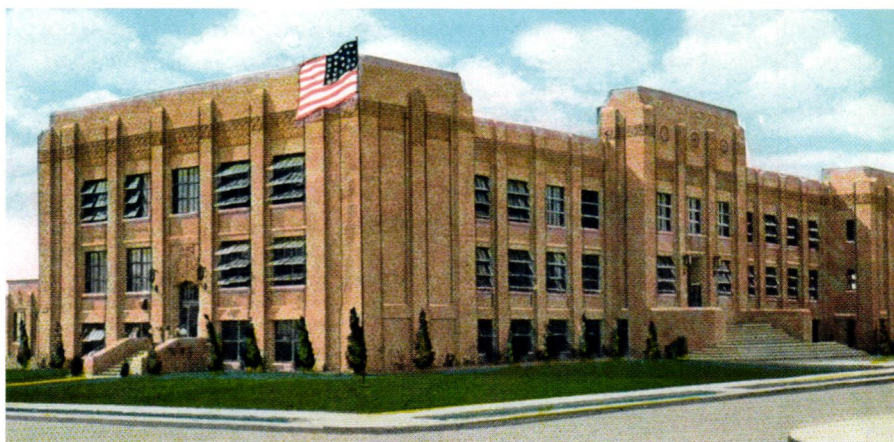
### ARIZONA CLUB

If there was a Bellagio of early 20th century Fremont Street, the this was most definitely it. Owned by J.C. McIntosh and designed by Las Vegas' first architect, C. Chamberlain, the Arizona Club opened in 1905 in a section of the infamous Block 16 that was dotted by run-of-the-mill saloons that doubled as brothels. It

was far and away the most impressive piece of early architecture here. Patrons were drawn to the club by a large, magnificent—for its time—façade and a front entrance that consisted of leaded beveled glass on the front doors. The inside was just as swanky, with carved red-mahogany columns, mahogany wainscoting, polished marble baseboards and an enormous main bar. The Arizona Club was the place to drink and gamble. By 1912, the year McIntosh sold the club, it also became the place to fornicate: New owners erected a second-story brothel, and the Arizona Club quickly became known as the "Queen of Block 16." By 1941, the place sat vacant. Shortly thereafter, the Arizona Club met a fate not unlike other Vegas icons that would follow: It was demolished—along with the rest of Block 16—to make way for parking lots.

### OLD DOWNTOWN SCHOOLS

The Fifth Street School and Las Vegas High no longer carry the same names, but these vintage Vegas schoolhouses, where some of our most influential citizens were educated, remain more functional than ever in a place that needs it: Downtown. The old grammar school, a Mission/Spanish Revival-style building that earned historic status in 1988, has been through a few reincarnations—most recently a police substation. Its next life will be as a home for various revitalization projects that foster the arts, literature and intellectual thought. The old high school is still a high school, but for the last decade, much more. As the Las Vegas Academy of International Studies, Visual and Performing Arts, it's a nationally honored magnet school for gifted students. On the outside, it remains the city's best example of Art Deco architecture. The three-story concrete building on Seventh Street is clad in stucco and cast concrete friezes depicting animals, vegetation and medallions. The central pavilion with the main entrance is the most elaborate element.



The art deco-influenced Las Vegas High School.



# Buildings



The AIA award-winning Lloyd D. George Federal Courthouse.

## MOULIN ROUGE

The famed former nightclub and casino is on the National Register of Historic Places more for its social impact—the first racially mixed hotel-casino in Vegas and scene of a historic 1960 integration agreement—than for architectural significance. Designed by Walter Zick and Harris Sharp Architects, in accord with contemporary Strip Modernist stylings, and completed in 1955, a one-story casino and theater were attached to a two-story motel. The four-story block “billboard” tower carried the signature script, corresponding to the impressive roof-mounted red neon sign. These, as well as the neon-outlined full-size figures of French café life that adorned the wall under the canopy, were the product of Betty Willis (of “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas” sign fame). A 2003 fire destroyed the casino, but the sign and tower remain, and hopes run high among developers (amid a sea of skepticism) that the building can be restored and made a viable enterprise—thus keying the redevelopment of the economically depressed Bonanza Road area.

## LLOYD D. GEORGE FEDERAL COURTHOUSE

Sited on Las Vegas Boulevard but with eyes toward Downtown, the impressive courthouse seems to signify the permanence of an increased federal presence in Sin City. Completed in 2000 to new security standards, the L-shaped, \$95 million, 17-story, 437,000-square-foot building was an AIA Nevada Design Award winner. Glass, wood and terrazzo have been blended attractively by architectural firms Cannon Dworsky, Langdon Wilson and HCA with granite, limestone and white marble.

## LAS VEGAS CITY HALL

By 1973, when the new city hall was dedicated, Las Vegas had become Nevada’s largest city. Between 1940 and 1970 the population had grown 15-fold—and the city’s budget had multiplied by a factor of 45. So the modern 11-story building designed by Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall reflected this new position of the city within the state, and the government within the community. The building turned its back, a curving marble blank wall, on Downtown, repudiating the old style and scale. The front was more inviting, the entry set in a wall of smoked glass, and an open plaza surrounded by a three-story circular office complex.

## CLARK COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER

It remains, a decade later, one of the area’s most unique and admired pieces of architecture. But just as unique was Clark County’s decision back in the early 1990s to stage a national architecture competition for its new center. The contest, the first of its kind in Nevada, yielded 30 applicants from across the country, and from that, three finalists were chosen. When the dust settled, the Denver-based firm of Fentress, Bradburn and Associates, in association with local firm Domingo Cambeiro, earned the bid and proceeded to design an award-winning terracotta sandstone structure that pays homage to our desert environs rather than our casino culture. The 385,000-square-foot, six-story facility features a series of interconnecting buildings, including a pyramid-shaped structure that serves as the cafeteria and a dramatic multistory rotunda. The centerpiece is a grass-lined amphitheater, used for public concerts and fairs, that spins out of the southern end of the main structure. Built on a 39-acre parcel on the site of the Union Pacific Railroad freight yard at a cost of \$68 million, the government center serves as a beautiful reminder that there indeed can be more to Las Vegas architecture than glittering high rises.



### PREDOCK LIBRARY

When, in the late '80s, the library district wanted to branch out and to combine these facilities with other cultural functions, it brought in the big gun of contemporary desert architecture, Antoine Predock of Albuquerque (working in association with local firm Swisher Hall). The resulting "oasis" near the historic Old Mormon Fort was the Las Vegas Library and Lied Discovery Museum. The complex of simple geometric shapes—a triangle for administrative functions, a cone within which children could party, a 110-foot-high cylinder of science—utilizes desert colors in native sandstone and concrete, and courtyards with desert-friendly landscaping.

### NEVADA POWER

The power company is nearly as old as Las Vegas itself. Established in 1906, the firm enabled the city to grow from a one-stop railroad town into a modern metropolis. It has also been an environmental leader by creating a Green Power program in 1998, and donating its solar power facilities to the Desert Research Institute in 1999. The company additionally recycles more than 63,000 gallons of used motor and equipment oil annually, while performing community conservation work. Nevada Power Company's 23-year-old ultra energy-efficient headquarters, designed by JMA Architecture Studios, opened in Las Vegas long before terms like "sustainability" came into vogue.

### WEST SAHARA LIBRARY

Another in the branch library/cultural center series is this 1996 desert beauty designed by Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle and Tate & Snyder. The \$15 million expressionist structure, made of concrete and metal, provides natural lighting modified by shading devices. The 119,000 square feet feature a cylinder holding the children's reading room and a fine-arts gallery operated by the Las Vegas Art Museum.

### OLD MORMON FORT

An adobe fort built by Mormon missionaries in 1855 is the Las Vegas Valley's first permanent and oldest existing building. Constructed from sun-dried bricks, the 150-square-foot structure was abandoned and eventually became part of the Las Vegas Ranch sold to the railroad. It was later

used by the government to test cement during construction of the Hoover Dam before being added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. While only part of the original fort still stands today, the re-created complex serves as a state park at Washington Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard. An award-winning, 5,000-square-foot visitor's center, designed by assemblageSTUDIO, was recently completed.

### LIED LIBRARY

After its 2001 opening, the five-story, zinc-clad building, with sweeping lines that make it feel like a deconstructionist sailing ship, quickly became an iconic fixture on the UNLV campus. Designed by Welles Pugsley Architects and Leo A. Daly, the library has a contemporary aesthetic that speaks to an industrial, technology-driven age. The building is a brazen symbol of the university's future. ✱



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## One Powerful Year

*Hosting a 25,000-architect convention with keynote speeches by Wynn and Marnell, curating exhibits for the city's Centennial, debuting a film on the future ... those are just some of the 2005 highlights for AIA Las Vegas*

ON MAY 19-21, AS THE HOST CHAPTER FOR THE AIA 2005 NATIONAL CONVENTION AND DESIGN EXPOSITION, AIA Las Vegas will welcome 25,000 architects and design professionals from all over the world. While the Mandalay Bay Convention Center will be the headquarters for this monumental event, the entire city will be on display as never before—with architecture, and those who create it, taking center stage.

The theme of the convention is "The Power of Architecture: Imagine, Create, Transform," and certainly no other city in the country exemplifies or demonstrates this theme more precisely. For it is the power of architecture that has established and continues to identify Las Vegas. Through the imagination and creativity of architects and visionaries, the Southern Nevada desert has been transformed into a city whose glittering lights attract more than 38 million visitors each year and 8,000 new residents each month. The architecture has established an economy that is consistently among the strongest and most vital in the nation. It is the architecture, the sense of place that has been created, along with all of its images and illusions, that has made Las Vegas.

### Wynn and Marnell in starring roles

Las Vegas legend Steve Wynn and renowned developer Tony Marnell will be the keynote speakers at the National Convention. Both are featured in a special documentary film titled *Future Community*, which will premiere at the convention and open the first general session on May 19 (see below). On that evening, convention attendees will have an opportunity to hear both men at a special presentation, "A Conversation with Steve Wynn and Tony Marnell," from 6:45 to 7:45 p.m. in the Margaux Room at the new Wynn Las Vegas resort. This special event will provide an exceptional opportunity to learn about the future of Las Vegas and how this extraordinary city influences other communities throughout the world.

### Las Vegas documentary to debut

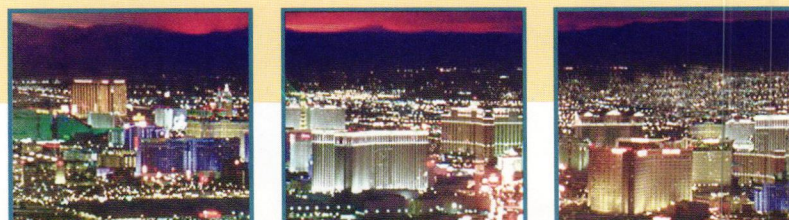
The AIA 2005 National Convention will open with the world premiere of a documentary film titled *Future Community*, which explores the idea of what constitutes "community." How do we define it? How does a community such as Las Vegas compare with an Amish community in Pennsylvania, the pueblos and straw-bale neighborhoods of Arizona, the affluent gated estates of the Florida coast and the all-American communities of middle America? How is the ever-expanding global village altering where and how we live? And how we feel about where we live? The film spurs viewers to consider these questions and to realize fully the architectural profession's critical role in our understanding of these fundamental human concepts. Las Vegas provides an excellent setting for the film and for the discussion—it is an extraordinary urban laboratory, providing the opportunity to explore the challenges of population growth, infrastructure, water conservation, sustainable design, transportation, housing and even the architecture of entertainment. Produced by the American Institute of Architects, it will air on public television nationally sometime after the convention.

### Celebrating 100 years

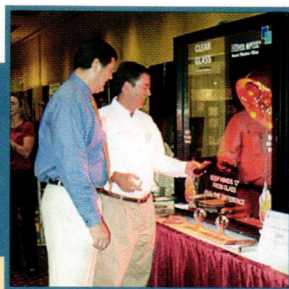
As a part of the national convention and the city's Centennial celebration, AIA Las Vegas has created "The Vegas Century," a special section in this magazine that is also an exhibit, showcasing the 100 people, events, ideas and structures that have been most significant in our city's development. The exhibit will be open to the public from April 1 through May 21 at the main hall of the Fashion Show mall. Admission is free.

### Architecture issues in the media

Nevada Public Radio (KNPR 88.9-FM) and the *Las Vegas Business Press* have joined with AIA Las Vegas to help host the 2005 national convention and to celebrate the city's Centennial. Throughout the year, special programs and articles will focus on the architectural issues and concerns of the community. Beginning in April, KNPR's "State of Nevada" will focus on "Building Las Vegas for the Next 100 Years." This series will feature speakers and experts who will be participating in the convention and will explore the impact of architecture on the quality of life in Southern Nevada. Be listening weekdays from 9 to 11 a.m. to hear discussions about the challenge of building schools, designing livable senior communities, revitalizing Downtown and creating the sense of community we crave. You'll also hear from the architects, planners and civic leaders in other cities who are using the power of architecture to transform their communities. Also, the *Las Vegas Business Press* has begun featuring a monthly column titled "The Power of Architecture," which focuses on issues and concerns in architecture, planning, design and construction. Articles will be written by AIA member architects.







## CHAPTER EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND EXHIBITS

*Each year, the AIA Las Vegas provides meetings, lectures, seminars and public outreach programs that educate and benefit its members and the general public. If you are interested in architecture and design, please join us at an event or become a member. The following is a synopsis of what we are offering in 2005. Our exhibits are funded in part by a grant from the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.*

**"Ten Years of Excellence in Design"**—Over the last 10 years, architectural projects throughout the state have been recognized and honored through the AIA Nevada Excellence in Design Awards program. The award winners have been brought together to form a retrospective exhibit of design excellence. The exhibit will be open to the public through May 10 at the UNLV Architecture Studies Library in the Paul B. Sogg Architecture Building (on Brussels Street, just off Tropicana) on the UNLV Campus.

**AIA Membership Meetings**—The Chapter meets on the third Wednesday of each month (check date, time, location and program details at [www.aialasvegas.org](http://www.aialasvegas.org)). The meetings provide a social reception hour, dinner and a program or speaker. This year's theme for the programs is "Celebrating Las Vegas." Meeting topics include "The Future: Clark County's Growth Plan," "The Past: Celebrating the History of Las Vegas," "Building Alliances: The Benefits of Partnering," "The Present: Demographics of Las Vegas," "Forms of Practice" and "Transit & Transportation."

**The Committee on the Environment**—This is one of the most active and important committees of the AIA Las Vegas Chapter. The AIA LV-COTE is committed to increasing public awareness about the benefits of energy and water conservation and recycling, and to promoting livable, sustainable communities in Southern Nevada. Our lecture series, "Sustaining Nevada," brings nationally known speakers and advocates for sustainable design to the Las Vegas area. Check dates, times and locations for these presentations on our website, [www.aialasvegas.org](http://www.aialasvegas.org).

**The Klai Juba Lecture Series**—Provided by local architects John Klai, AIA, and Dan Juba, AIA, this series allows the UNLV School of Architecture to bring internationally renowned architects and designers to the school for special presentations and visits with the students and the public. Check out [www.aialasvegas.org](http://www.aialasvegas.org) for upcoming lectures.

**AIA Las Vegas High School Design Awards**—For more than 25 years, the AIA Las Vegas has recognized and rewarded young designers in Clark County high schools. Each year, the chapter extends a "design challenge" to art and drafting classes, whose students then work on their projects with the help of AIA member advisers. Each April, their work is juried and awards are presented to all who participate, with special cash awards to those who show exceptional talents in design and architecture. Over the years, many of the participants in this program have gone on to attend architecture school and then to establish careers in the design professions. The High School Design Awards Banquet and Awards Ceremony will be April 20 in the Second Floor Ballroom at the Gold Coast Hotel.

**The 32nd Annual AIA Golf Tournament**—One of the annual highlights for AIA members and the local business community, this year's tournament will be at Spanish Trail on October 17. Prizes, raffles and a silent auction are a part of the festivities with the proceeds benefiting the UNLV Architecture Studies Library. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Team and player spaces sell out quickly, so make your reservation now. Contact AIA Las Vegas at 895-0936. We also stage two Putting Tournaments each year, one in the spring (June 3) and one in the fall (September 9), both at Angel Park Golf Course and open to all who want to enjoy a fun evening.

**The AIA Nevada Excellence in Design and Distinguished Service Awards Programs**—A part of the stated mission of AIA Nevada (and AIA Las Vegas) is to support and promote quality architecture and to recognize excellence in design and service to the profession and to the community. This mission is realized in the annual AIA Nevada Excellence in Design and Distinguished Service Awards programs, hosted this year by the AIA Las Vegas. The date and location of the event will be announced in June, with the call for entries going out in July and submittal binders and materials due in October. The black-tie event will feature an exhibit of all entries, along with a silent auction to benefit the AIA Scholarship Endowment Fund. In addition to the design awards, AIA members' service to the community and the profession will be honored. Please visit our website, [www.aialasvegas.org](http://www.aialasvegas.org), for details.

**AIA Las Vegas Product Show**—This is the major promotional event of the year. Attended by AIA members, interior designers, landscape architects, specifiers, engineers, contractors and all members of the Las Vegas architectural community, this year's event will be in October, with the date and venue to be determined. Booth space is available now (each is 10 by 10 feet), and this show always sells out early, so reserve your booth today. For additional information, contact Kelly Lavigne at 702.895.0936 or [klavigne@aianeveda.org](mailto:klavigne@aianeveda.org).



### What is the AIA?

The AIA stands for the American Institute of Architects. It is the national association for architects and design professionals. When you see the designation "AIA" following the name of an architect, it means that he or she is a fully licensed and registered architect who upholds the highest standards of ethics and professional practice. It means that he or she is a member of the AIA and dedicated to providing quality design, safeguarding the public and improving our built environment.

The American Institute of Architects was created in 1857. For the last 148 years, the organization has provided education, government advocacy, community development and public outreach activities, and has endeavored to create an environment that is responsive to the people it serves. As members of the AIA, more than 80,000 licensed architects and associated professionals express their commitment to quality design and livability in our communities throughout the country.

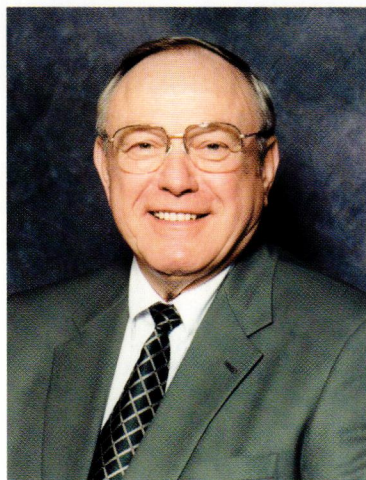
The Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects—AIA Las Vegas—was established in 1956 and has now served the Las Vegas community for nearly half a century.

The architects and design professionals of AIA Las Vegas invite you to join with us to generate a greater awareness of art and architecture in our community and to improve the quality of our built environment.

For further information, please contact the AIA Las Vegas office at 702-895-0936, or visit our website, [www.aialasvegas.org](http://www.aialasvegas.org), or the AIA national website, [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org).



# Scheideman Tops the List of Distinguished Service Award Winners



THE SILVER MEDAL, THE HIGHEST HONOR that AIA Nevada can bestow upon an individual architect, was awarded to Elton Dale Scheideman in recognition of his distinguished service to the profession of architecture.

Scheideman's 45-year career in architecture includes 30 years in the United States Air Force, retiring with the rank of colonel, and then 14 years as director of New School and Facility Planning and Construction for the Clark County School District. He has been the principal planner of three successful school construction bond programs valued at more than \$4.8 billion, and

which will provide 200 new schools in Southern Nevada by 2008.

In 2003, Scheideman served as president of the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and he currently serves as president of the state organization, AIA Nevada. He is a national director for the Council of Educational Planners International and has served as president of the Southwest region. He is a member of the Las Vegas Steering Committee for the AIA 2005 National Convention and Design Exposition in Las Vegas this May. As chairman of the Legacy Project for the convention, he established the Design for Learning Foundation (see Page 16).

Each year, the Nevada Chapter of the American Institute of Architects honors the achievements of exceptional members and firms through its Distinguished Service Awards. Other honorees in 2004 included:

**Klai Juba Architects, Architecture Firm Award**, which goes to the firm that has consistently produced distinguished architecture for a period of at least 10 years and has exhibited a commitment to be of service to the public and the American Institute of Architects. This is the highest honor the state can bestow on a firm. (See story on Page 25).

**Ric Licata (AIA, TMCC in Reno), AIA Nevada Service Award**, presented to an individual AIA member who has contributed significantly to the profession through the American Institute of Architects. Licata is a principal at Licata Hansen Associates and professor of architecture at Truckee Meadows Community College. He is an advocate for community involvement in the design and planning process and seeks to educate the public on how AIA members can contribute to quality of life and the quality of the built environment. He is currently president of the Northern Nevada Chapter of the AIA and has an ambitious program designed to involve the members as well as the public.

**R. Brandon Sprague (AIA, Aptus Architecture), Young Architect Citation**, which recognizes the individual who, at an early stage of his or her architectural career, has shown exceptional leadership in design, education and/or service to the profession. Sprague is principal and founder of the newly established Aptus Architecture. Before that he was a partner with Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini, where he led the design and production efforts in the firm's Las Vegas office and received regional and statewide recognition for design excellence. He is involved in many service organizations, including the Friends of the Wetlands, and the Friends of Henderson District Public Libraries. Brandon has served as president and treasurer of the AIA Las Vegas Chapter and on the board of the AIA Nevada Chapter. ■

## Roger Peltyn: A True Pillar of the Community

VERY FEW PEOPLE HAVE STRENGTHENED LAS VEGAS' foundation as much as Roger Peltyn.

As president of the engineering firm Martin & Peltyn Inc., he oversaw the structural design of many important buildings on our landscape, from major landmarks along the Strip to schools across the district. As a resident of Las Vegas, he supported the community on numerous levels, from arts advocacy to aiding the jobless.

So when Roger Peltyn passed away last June, he left a void in both his profession and in his community.

"Nevada will miss Roger Peltyn," U.S. Senator Harry Reid said. "But his legacy will live on in the magnificent buildings he helped to construct and the community he helped to create. Nevada is a better place because of him."

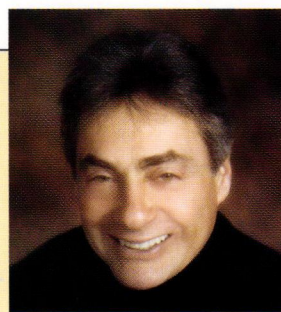
Peltyn, a Brooklyn native and Penn State graduate, brought his engineering skills to Las Vegas in 1981 to help Steve Wynn with the Golden Nugget expansion.

His company, which he ran with partner Jack Martin, grew from a team of five to more than 60 over the last two decades. Along the way, Martin & Peltyn did the structural work on some of the Strip's most significant properties, including the Mirage, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, Luxor and Excalibur, as well as Park Towers, a dozen Clark County high schools and many office buildings and retail centers.

Peltyn also led commercial developments in all 50 states as well as in several other countries, including Great Britain, Spain and Guam.

Most recently Peltyn served as trustee for the UNLV President's Council and held directorships with the Southern Nevada Seismic Safety Council, Nevada Development Authority, Clark County Public Education Foundation, Specialty Mortgage Trust and the Desert Research Institute.

"Roger's efforts to celebrate the strengths of



Nevada were unflagging, serving as an informal ambassador of commerce whenever and wherever possible, encouraging other businesses to consider relocating to our state, smoothing the way for further economic development,"

Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn said.

In addition, Peltyn and his wife, Sandy, have been credited with helping raise more than \$6 million and dedicated countless hours of his time for worthy causes.

Peltyn was president of the Nevada Arts Advocates, a statewide advocacy group working to advance the arts and culture throughout the state. He was a key supporter of the Foundation for an Independent Tomorrow, a nonprofit agency that empowers men and women to move beyond marginal jobs and public assistance to self-sufficiency.

He served as chairman for Opportunity Village and was selected for Who's Who in the West. ■



# MENDENHALL SMITH

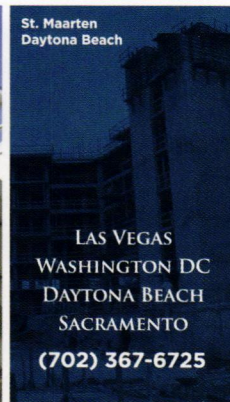
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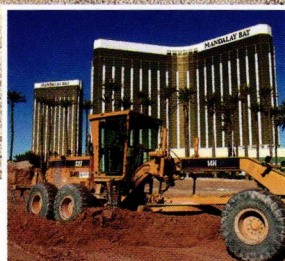
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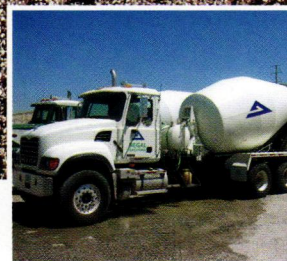
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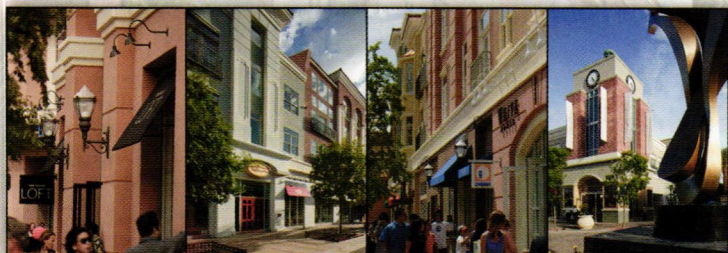
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## New & Notable continued from page 22

project, the largest of its kind in the country, will sort luggage more efficiently, which means fewer Maui-bound bags ending up in Madrid. More essential, however, is the system's integration of bomb-screening equipment mandated by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration. Among the technologies are 42 explosive-detection machines. That's safety and convenience, together at last.

Car rentals and convenience have also traditionally been mutually exclusive at McCarran. However, **Swisher & Hall, AIA**, has drawn up a solution to make them synonymous. The **Consolidated Car Rental Facility** at Warm Springs Road and Giles Street will put 10 agencies in one location. The \$144 million center comprises an elliptical "mall" housing the agencies and a surrounding parking garage with the space of 400 football fields. Also included are administrative offices, 125 gas pumps and maintenance garages. The most difficult facet of the project has been conquered: Swisher & Hall execs developed a design that assures the fierce competitors equal visibility. But it's the customers they're trying to lure who benefit most from the design. Planners say no customer will have to travel more than 300 feet from counter to car. The plans call for an aesthetic that combines the natural sandstones and earth tones of the desert with aluminum wall panels and metal ceilings that reflect the high-tech imagery of air transportation. The grand opening is set for early 2006. Airport officials around the country are studying the project for possible applications at their facilities.

## Building a transition zone

If what happens in Vegas earns you time in the slammer, you might eventually find yourself at the state's first **transitional center for prison inmates**. Phase I of Casa Grande, designed to gently reintroduce the incarcerated into society, is scheduled to open this July at Russell and Wynn Roads in Las Vegas. The venerable **Molasky Group of Companies** is developing the \$21 million complex, which **KGA Architecture** designed to take on the feel of college dorm life. Casa Grande will also provide parenting classes, life-skills training and counseling, among other functions. The first phase will accommodate 200 inmates; the second and final phase, scheduled for completion by early 2006, will offer an additional 200 beds.

## New science of health facilities

When you think of world-class customer service, concierges, valet parking and upscale cafés, you think of ... health care? Well, maybe not. But the **Nevada Cancer Institute** will raise expectations by including such resort-style amenities. Taking a page from local hotel development—**Heather Murren**, the institute's cofounder, is married to **MGM Mirage** exec **Jim Murren**—the project's first phase, a four-story, 140,000-square-foot building, is scheduled for completion in mid-2005. **Marnell Corrao Associates** designed the \$52 million, steel-framed structure, which will house pharmacology, genetics and molecular biology research labs, as well as outpatient research-linked clinical services. Its soothing, modern aesthetic features red sandstone, glass and accents of native Nevada stone. Though plans aren't imminent, the 61-acre site will allow for expansion. Such growth is likely:

The center, which will focus on drug development, is aiming to become one of a handful of cancer centers nationwide to earn the designation "Comprehensive Cancer Center" from the National Cancer Institute.

The severe shortage of hospital beds for the mentally ill will ease with the completion in early 2006 of a 150-bed **psychiatric hospital** that **HMC Architects of Nevada** has designed at Jones and Oakey Boulevards. The \$24 million, 101,600-square-foot building has a 30-bed observation unit, triage rooms, seclusion rooms, group therapy areas and physician offices arrayed around a central outdoor courtyard with additional therapy areas. Clerestory windows will bring natural light into interior activity spaces, helping to create a warmer, non-institutional atmosphere for patients.

With its two-story, 13,000-square-foot **Center for Maternal-Fetal Medicine** at 2011 Pinto Lane, in the heart of the city's medical district, **Carpenter Sellers Associates** is aiming to set an aesthetic precedent for future architecture in the neighborhood. Various materials and forms symbolize the connection between mother, father and child. For example, an exterior stone circulation element features a central core surrounded by two complementary materials—one translucent and one solid metal. The \$2 million building includes offices, triage, exam rooms, records storage, ultrasound rooms, labs, testing capabilities and a conference room. The building, which partners **Steve Wold** and **Dr. Brian Iriye** own, should open in June.

## The latest business plans

With about half of its 400,000 square feet of space built, **Marnell Corrao** continues to break new ground in local office development with the **Marnell Corporate Center** along Sunset Road near Giles Street. Construction begins this year on its fourth building, a 91,000-square-foot office that will open in 2006. The 30-acre business park—already known for the cutting-edge design and gourmet cuisine at its Panevino restaurant—departs from the conventional Vegas office park in numerous ways. Buildings will be clustered around a central park with a gazebo and outdoor lunch areas. Walking trails interlink the buildings, and landscaping hides parking lots from view. Combined with the less-is-more aesthetic of the buildings, Marnell Corporate Center is a local commercial landmark in the making.

An office park in the southwest plans to raise Class B commercial design a couple of notches. **Nigro Associates** is developing **Desert Canyon Business Park** near Russell Road and I-215. **Perlman Architects** is designing the 11-building project, and though LEED certification isn't on the agenda, Perlman drafters are incorporating elements of the program. In the flagship building—a two-story, 55,000-square-foot structure that broke ground in January—concrete construction will create thermal mass for enhanced insulation. Three-quarters of the building's daytime illumination will consist of natural light. Reflective glass will reduce summertime temperatures, while glazing is minimized altogether to the south and southwest. Overhangs and canopies also provide shading. Inside materials call for paints, carpets and finishes with low levels of volatile organic compounds. The L-shaped building doesn't skimp on aesthetic conceits: Perlman's **Garry Hoholik** says the "grandiose" entrance will have "one of the nicest lobbies for a [Class] B-type office building in Las Vegas." The two-story atrium will have the feel of public space, with large volume clerestory windows and



mahogany, maple and stainless-steel finishes. Hoholik says the remainder of the park will share material palettes with the first building, though subtle differences will help "each building be distinctive unto itself."

When is a box not just a box? **Carpenter Sellers Associates** transformed a simple rectangular design for the 4,000-square-foot **Summerlin branch of Town and Country Bank** into an artistic statement with the addition of a gently curving roof. The roof starts high over the drive-through area and lifts off the building to provide clerestory windows for natural light from the north, south and east. As it arcs toward the front entrance, it drops low to provide an aesthetic focal point and deliver rainwater to the landscaping. The skin makes liberal use of weathered stone in compliance with the existing shopping center at Charleston Boulevard and Indigo Run. Inside, stone and wood reflect a warm Midwestern aesthetic that matches the bank's Nebraska roots. Stone buttress walls support the main building to convey a sense of security and permanence—good qualities for any bank to project. The \$800,000 structure, which **Tiberti Construction** is building, is scheduled to open this spring.

## Moderne times in Henderson

Downtown Las Vegas gets all of the headlines for its redevelopment projects—from the under-construction **SoHo Lofts** at Hoover Street and Las Vegas Boulevard to the 7.5 million-square-foot, \$1 billion **World Market Center**, whose first phase will open later this summer. But **Downtown Henderson** is also a hotbed of redevelopment and new development. The city established a Downtown Design Standards Ordinance, a set of zoning rules that outlines desired themes for commercial development in the city center, including making Water Street more hospitable to pedestrians and implementing a 1940s Art Deco design theme called *Moderne*.

**MWT-Ofra Architecture** has created *Moderne* designs for the first building, **The Pinnacle**, a 15,000-square-foot mixed-use project with a bakery and coffee shop on the first floor and executive offices on the second and third floors. With the Downtown Design Standards provision for 100 percent build-out of the lot, canopies and balconies will encroach on the sidewalk, creating an inviting outdoor atmosphere for the coffee shop. **VLP Investments LLC** is developing the Pinnacle, which should open in August.

Henderson officials aren't just targeting new businesses for downtown. The 65-unit **Parkline lofts**, due to open later this year on Basic Road, will offer affordable condos (from the \$100,000s) with 800 to 1,680 square feet. San Francisco-based **Holt Hinshaw** designed the Jack Webb project to mimic the color and material palettes of the neighboring City Hall and rec center. And near downtown, **HCA Architects** has designed **Aloft**, a 45,000-square-foot mixed-use project on Lake Mead Parkway. The first floor will include retail and office space, while the second through fifth floors will contain condominiums with stunning valley views. **Steve Arrington** is developing the project.

## More mixed-use

Think of development around St. Rose Dominican's Siena Campus and you probably picture miles and miles of suburban sprawl. But **Perlman Architects** would like to bring a little urban flavor to the intersec-

tion of St. Rose Parkway and Jeffreys Street. For landowner **AGO Irrevocable Trust**, Perlman has designed a condominium community encompassing three towers of up to 175 feet with 316 homes. On the ground floor, 60,000 square feet of retail and a health club will anchor the development. Residents will park in a two-story underground garage, while shop patrons will park in front of stores, Main Street-style. The project is in design review at the City of Henderson.

At Lake Las Vegas, **Perlman** has taken a new approach to design with **Il Pico**, a condominium development by Il Pico LLC. Architects started the process with interiors. "We used an organic flow to the floor plans, so you don't have rigid, straight walls, corners or sharp edges," says **Robert Deleeon**, senior designer. "There are curves and lines of movement—the plans have more fluidity. We started from the inside and moved outward so none of the units would feel the same." The result: a Moorish-Andalusian aesthetic that loosely shares the Mediterranean resort's. Floor plans range from 2,500 to 2,900 square feet. The intimate community will have just six buildings of six units each, all of which will have private lobbies accessible via elevators. Interior finishes will include marbles, woods and granites. The precast-concrete construction will feature a smooth-stucco finish. The project is in design review.

The city of Las Vegas isn't without its own trend-setting mixed-use projects. First, **Perlman** has designed **930 @ Third**, a five-story, 86-unit condo development with 14,000 square feet of retail on the first floor at the northwest corner of Third Street and Coolidge Avenue. The building, one of the first mixed-use projects approved in the Downtown Arts District, features a parking structure at its center, shielded from view by the building itself. At Carson Avenue and Maryland Parkway, the first project approved under the city's Live/Work Ordinance is under construction. The three-story **Urban Lofts**, designed by **Larry S. Davis & Associates** of Houston, will include 30 units that combine living and work space. At Third Street and Bonneville, the city is considering **CityMark**, a project with 13 live-work spaces and 329 residential units. In addition to 8,600 square feet of commercial space, CityMark will incorporate an array of housing types, including townhouses, lofts and flats.

In northwest Vegas, the city has approved its first Traditional Neighborhood Design project. The **Carina Corporation's Village of Centennial Springs** at the corner of Farm and Tule Springs Roads will combine a mixed-use commercial center with live-work residences, a park and 211 single-family homes. The idea? To mimic self-contained communities back East.

## Loft living moving south

Way down Las Vegas Boulevard, at the corner of Pebble Road, **Loft 5** is under way. The five-story, 272-unit luxury residential building by Manhattan-based ADG Development will feature "modern loft" living with minimalist design and upscale amenities. There will be penthouse and multilevel lofts, ranging from 1,200 to 2,500 square feet, with floor-to-ceiling windows throughout and private sky decks. The "Vegas package" includes an outdoor hot tub, bar and fireplace. The \$65 million project will be completed next spring. The community plan for the 10 acres will accommodate residents with two courtyards with a lifestyle center and a club lounge. ■

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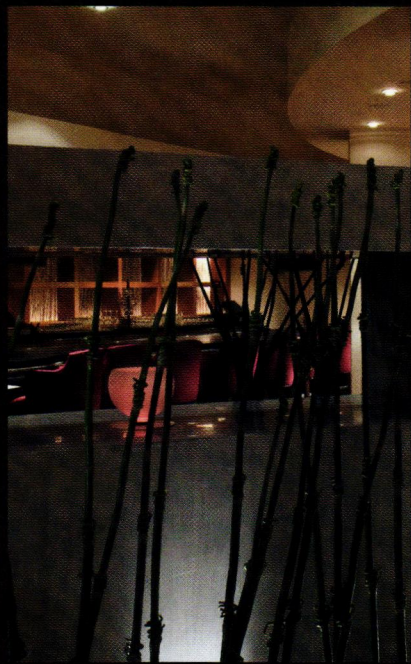
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## New Urbanism *continued from page 51*

parks and trails. Mountain Edge, near Blue Diamond, includes a small mountain and is traversed by the route of the original Spanish Trail. Utilizing both the local topography and history, the development adopts the Old West as a theme for its public amenities, which includes a park that will be given over to the county. About 550 out of the development's total 3,000 acreage will be devoted to park space, an unusually high percentage. Model homes opened in late 2004 and interest has been strong. The 1,200-acre Providence community, which will offer model homes next year, is themed around "American Traditions" and will capitalize on broad tree-lined avenues for its look.

Focus has obviously been moving toward providing greater pedestrian amenities while increasing a sense of communal identity in its projects, and the Henderson project is not a revolutionary break from earlier work, but a step in the company's evolution. Champlin anticipates that several architectural styles will be deployed in the Henderson villag-

McCullough Mountains, runoff from which has created substantial washes. "We'll put the villages on the ridges in between the washes and locate the main streets and civic areas in the highest areas, then build the houses down the hillsides, using the natural drainages."

As intelligent an alternative as it is to sprawl, New Urbanism is not without its critics. The pastel community of Seaside was so startlingly homogeneous in its adherence to style that it was used as the set for *The Truman Show*, a Hollywood satire on the suppression of human free will. Some of the master-planned communities in Las Vegas are little more than Mediterranean clone parks, part of the nationwide trend among developers to adopt superficial visual styles as a marketing ploy. It's a tendency that is exacerbated in Las Vegas by the proclivity of resorts to simulate Venice and other European locales.

Although the DPZ architects are intelligent enough to recognize the peril, the seven builders in the Focus consortium will need to rise above clichéd Styrofoam moldings in order to create an organic sense of community. Focus is developing a "kit of parts," according to

***"We can create shaded streets and trails, which will help cut down traffic within the community, but we need mass transit to get people to the Strip."***

es: "Southern Italian, Tuscan, Brownstone, Prairie, Mediterranean ... there will be a whole palette for folks to choose from. It will look kind of like what we already have in the Valley, but with a lot more architectural detail. We have a big emphasis on porches, and the houses will be side- or alley-loaded, pulling the facade out to the street, which is different from the other developments.

"Mountain Edge and Providence are more *traditional* traditional developments," he says, enjoying the irony, "in that, although walking is emphasized, you can't cross them on foot like you will be able to in these new neighborhoods, which will include shade structures such as arcades."

New Urbanism emphasizes a strong relationship to local topography, shaping development to fit the land instead of sculpting terrain for the convenience of the builders. The Focus property, which extends westward from Anthem toward Interstate 15, is bordered on the north by the Henderson Executive Airport and to the south by the

Champlin, which will make affordable a level of architectural detailing needed to create cohesive design within each neighborhood.

Beyond the matter of visual style reside deeper structural criticisms of the movement. For one thing, its communities can easily become just more high-priced bedroom commutes. The majority of the employment available in the town centers are usually low-paying service jobs, such as pulling lattes at a Seattle-based franchise, the tips from which wouldn't pay your rent in a granny flat, much less buy a Tuscan townhouse. And residents still tend to drive out into the urban environment in order to make the majority of their purchases at chain supermarkets and big-box stores.

Ritter bluntly acknowledges the problems. "The typical development has 200 acres of entry-level houses, 200 acres of move-ups, 200 acres of luxury homes. We want to mix socioeconomic classes and age groups—but Las Vegas will always be a community where the majority of employment is located in one place. We can create shaded streets and trails, which will



help cut down traffic within the community, but we need mass transit to get people to the Strip. It may take 10 years, but Henderson is working on that. And we're building transportation centers in the villages for buses and trolleys to connect people to that system."

New Urbanism doesn't address the larger issues of growth in the Las Vegas Valley and elsewhere in the arid West, but if handled with sensitivity to local conditions, it can raise the standards by which the growth proceeds. The charette that the DPZ firm conducted was an open process that provided Henderson's political leaders and civic employees with alternatives to zoomburgs

of snout houses built on cul-de-sacs. That combination of public education with architectural and design expertise is what needs to be duplicated countless times in Las Vegas as the city hits the edges of the Valley and begins to rebound. ■

*William L. Fox, a Los Angeles-based writer, has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Humanities, and has been a visiting scholar at the Getty Research Institute. His book about the nature of culture and the culture of nature in Las Vegas, In the Desert of Desire, will be released by the University of Nevada Press later this year.*

#### Neon continued from page 75

lights and more appealing images. The entertainment environment was impressing its own logic onto architecture for the new desert city. The commercial logic was quickly grasped and repeated.

The Boulder Club, Las Vegas Club, Lucky Strike, the Mint, Horseshoe, Frontier Club—after World War II the pace accelerated. One of the greatest examples was the 1946 Golden Nugget, designed by Kermit Wayne of YESCO. Like the rest of Las Vegas, it started out small: a single plaster-covered building on the corner, with curlicue Victorian tracery painted on its trim echoing the Barbary Coast saloon theme inside. As the casino grew, its owners returned to Wayne for additions, and the design grew. The skeletal frame sign overhead became a more magnificent tiara, and the neon crept over the plaster. Ultimately it stretched an entire block, with waves of multicolored electric light pulsing over its walls. The Victoriana remained, but now was transformed into an electric modern vision. Without the standard Modernist's fear of historic imagery, Wayne's freedom allowed him to mix everything—signage, imagery, neon—and his creativity allowed him to blend them into a smoothly integrated architectural expression.

Neon designers quickly picked up on neon's strengths. Ephemeral, easily transformed—an essential for the age of mass production and mass consumerism—neon facades could be easily adapted, the moldable tubes used to sketch any image or shape. The electro-Victorian Lucky Strike sign turned into the elegant Late Moderne Lucky Strike casino with overtones of World's Fair futur-

ism. This flexibility of the medium blurred traditional lines: At the 1957 Mint by Wayne, with architects Zick and Sharp, the neon sign became three-dimensional architecture, and the architecture became the sign.

"One wonders what a Gothic or a Baroque architect would have done to exploit [neon's] theatrical and illusionist possibilities, its capacity to transform not only a building but its immediate environment," wrote the great landscape observer J.B. Jackson in 1956. "One would have to be blind indeed not to respond to the fantastic beauty of any neon lighted strip after dark."

On the Las Vegas Strip—the county road on the outskirts of town—there evolved yet another distinct use of neon. Neon goes back to the very beginning of the Strip in 1941: El Rancho Vegas (the Strip's first hotel casino) boasted a neon-lined windmill to beckon drivers out of the night as they drove in from Los Angeles. The blend of rustic imagery and high-tech neon was to become typical of Las Vegas' aesthetic, combining a popular image with high-tech materials to create an urban landmark—taking the ordinary and turning it into the extraordinary.

As on Fremont Street, designers at YESCO, Federal, Ad-Art and other sign companies also experimented and pushed their art forward on the Strip—as in Chicago in 1890, when prosperous commercial conditions, freedom (even license) and creative talent encouraged the invention of skyscrapers by Adler and Sullivan, and Burnham and Root. The Thunderbird took a step in 1948, integrating the sign with the building by perching a mythological rainbow-hued avian atop the hotel's four-story tower. The use of neon quickly evolved in a string of designs, culmi-



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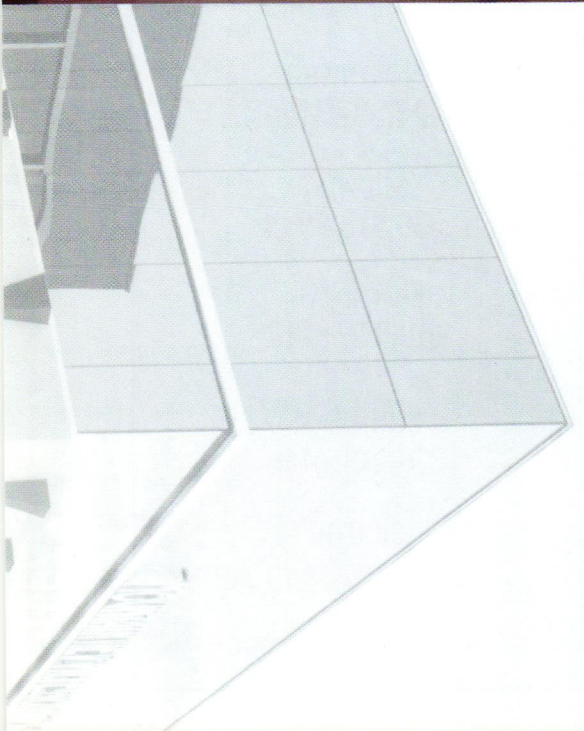
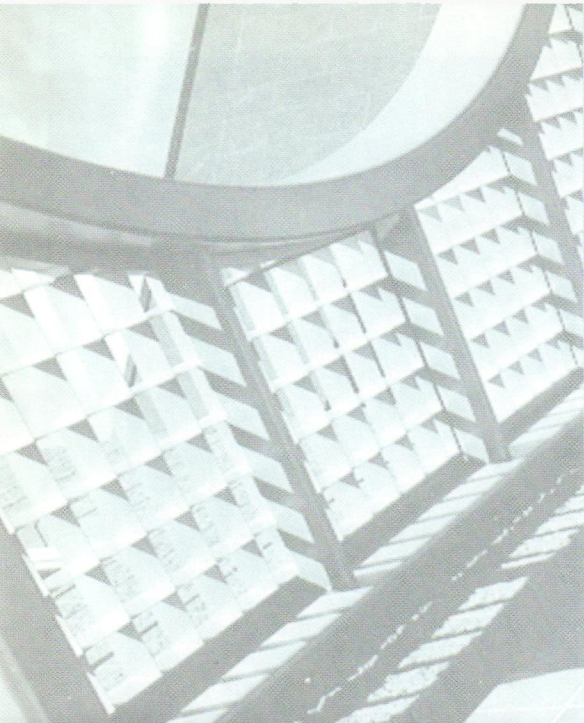
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nating in Kermit Wayne's first Stardust Hotel sign in 1958, which squeezed a horizontal slice of the galaxy into a 216-foot multimedia billboard facade of stars, comets, planets and a sputnik.

In the 1960s, verticality was introduced to the Strip with larger and larger sign pylons, great neon structures molded in a remarkable range of forms: the Sahara's minaret-esque, the Stardust's rain of extraterrestrial glitter over the Strip, the Riviera's ultra-posh brocade, and the Aladdin's seraglio extravaganza of dripping curtains, beaded tiaras and coruscating magic lamps.

The themes of the West and America came together in their most perfect form at the 180-foot Dunes sign, by Lee Klay of Federal Sign. Power, possibilities, populism, technology,



One of the few remaining signs of the old Glitter Gulch days.

freedom, audaciously expropriating the past for the purposes of the future. The Dunes sign was a desert wonder before it was heedlessly demolished in the mid 1990s. Shaped suggestively like a flattened onion dome and clad with horizontally arranged tubes of neon, the sequence of illumination could be triggered to light up from base to head in a few seconds. The trajectory of this visual illusion suggested the speed of a rocket, suddenly filling the black sky with color and light. The sheer power of this take-off prompted a fireworks of shimmering light as the giant letters at the

top spelled out D-U-N-E-S, each filled and emptied of light in turn. And all this action was accomplished virtually silently. The vast wasteland was set afire instantaneously; the power of the great turbines of nearby Hoover Dam was made manifest in the city; sleek neon mated with ancient onion dome. It was a miraculous and inspiring display of American art.

As on Fremont Street, the Strip's towers and pylons were essentially urbanistic, though stretched over the elastic distances of the automobile strip. They created landmarks to direct, identify, inform and give weight to spaces in the undifferentiated space of the desert. Neon proved the perfect medium.

These signs could take on organic abstractions at the Golden Nugget, or the realist imagery of Vegas Vic, or the phantasms of the Aladdin sign. In this spectrum can be seen the immense range of possibilities of neon, as expressed by the prodigal imaginations of Herman Boernge, Kermit Wayne, Charles Barnard, Lee Klay, Raul Rodrigues, and many others whose work inspired Tom Wolfe's inventive descriptions of a new art, unlike anything that came before: Boomerang Modern, Palette Curvilinear, Flash Gordon Ming-Alert Spiral, McDonald's Hamburger Parabola, Mint Casino Elliptical and Miami Beach Kidney. Wolfe recognized the genius at work. And virtually no one took him seriously. These men and women deserve a place in design history alongside Loewy, Dreyfuss, Bel Geddes, Teague, Earl, Exner and Eames. The ultimate American aesthetic was for cars, consumer products and neon signs.

After 1970, this punctuated vertical urbanism of giant signs and low buildings evolved into high-rise hotel towers that dwarfed the skyscraping signs. The corporate masters of Ramada, Hilton and Holiday Inn of this era succeeded the entrepreneurial Tony Cornero, Ben Siegel and Jay Sarno as Las Vegas trendsetters, but they appear not to have grasped the strengths of Las Vegas.

Today neon is only one of many architectural media in Las Vegas, again reflecting the multidimensional society around it.

Perforated Ceilings

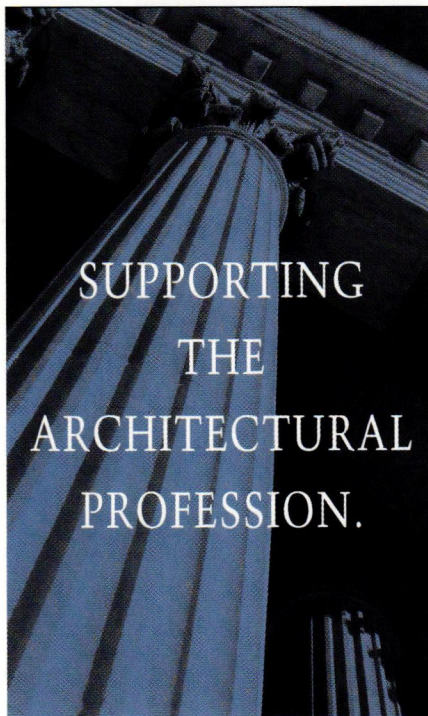
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The phantasms are still there in volcanoes and castles, in giant television screens in the sky. The mix and overlap of media and aesthetics, however, is in need of a contemporary Kermit Wayne to see the art in them and pull it all together.

Downtown, the Fremont Experience introduces another direction. Cutting off the neon from the deep night sky and placing it in a matrix of even light, the high-tech vault destroys the vivid contrast that made the signs urban landmarks. A few historic signs remain (Vegas Vic, El Cortez, Horseshoe) but most are gone. Some are enshrined in the Neon Museum's boneyard or ensconced on pedestals along Fremont Street just like art in a museum. What was once a popular art on display for all to see has evolved into a precious artifact.

Las Vegas neon signs' transformation of commercial imagery into architectural expression is as profound as Mies' transformation of factories into skyscrapers, or Le Corbusier's transformation of grain elevators into chapels and capitol, as Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour first

observed. But because it was inspired by the popular commercial vernacular rather than the chaste industrial vernacular, it was not taken seriously by the architectural profession.

Yet it is still true, as Banham wrote in 1970: "The Strip remains in the memory as the Superstrip of Superstrips; not just the main drag of Las Vegas but the main drag of the universal supercity of the American dream."

Las Vegas had no use for the abstraction or minimalism found in high-art design. It had neon's character of radiating color, animation and sketch work, and promoted extravagance, maximalism and opulence to organize a city along new lines. This is a side of American design that is often discouraged but never stamped out, especially in the neon city of Las Vegas. ■

*Alan Hess, a Los Angeles-based writer, has authored a number of books about architecture in the Southwest, including Viva Las Vegas: Afterhours Architecture. His latest book, Google Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture (Chronicle Books), includes a chapter about Las Vegas.*

#### **Marnell** continued from page 85

satellite office of Reno-based Corrao Construction Company. According to Marnell, Lud Corrao saw the growth potential of the Las Vegas market, so shortly after opening the office they formed Marnell Corrao Associates, the architecture side of the biz. "Lud had a real affinity and affection for design," Marnell says of this former partner who retired from the firm in 1982. "It was a very unique experience. This two-person relationship became the foundation for this design-build idea, and the challenges that were coming were much bigger than either of us."

Their first project was the Tivoli restaurant in Caesars Palace. The story goes that Cliff Perlman, chairman of Caesars World, thought the hotel had relied enough on the Bacchanal Room. So inside the coffee shop at Caesars, Marnell sketched out the design of a new restaurant on the back of a paper place mat. Marnell Corrao completed the restaurant in 72 working days—on budget and on time. Next came the Fantasy Tower and the world-famous Caesars Palace porte cochere.

Perlman was so impressed that he hired Marnell Corrao to complete the remodel of Caesars Atlantic City in 1985. "Caesars World gave us real credibility," Marnell says. "We were not just an idea; we were really an idea whose time had come."

Not wanting to be pigeonholed, they followed up Caesars Atlantic City with an office park here called South Tech. "We had the ability to build projects at the associated market's budgets, but if you're doing work for Caesars or Steve Wynn, the focus becomes on the biggest and the most expensive."

Wynn and Marnell hit it off from the start. "We enjoy a similar approach to problem solving," Marnell says. "Neither of us is afraid to make decisions and act on them. Steve is one of the few entrepreneurs that I have worked with that listens to my views regarding a host of subjects—not just design, building or architecture. We enjoy the ability and freedom to openly discuss a vast variety of subjects using each other's experiences, views and feelings, all in an effort to get to the best possible answer."

By the end of the Mirage project, Marnell was well-versed in the disciplines of designing and building megaresorts—so much so that he had decided to build his own. Marnell Corrao opened the Rio in 1990 (which nine years later he sold to Harrah's Entertainment Inc.). Convinced that the next generation of Vegas visitors would be younger and have even more disposable income, Marnell strayed from the family-friendly, themed resort concept that he helped create.

"We were trying to convince owners to explore



ideas that weren't hardcore themed driven," Marnell says. He felt that if the next generation of Vegas tourists wanted to see Paris or Rome, they'd hop a plane to Paris or Rome. Marnell wanted to offer a genuinely "Vegas" experience. His new hotel would offer upscale restaurants, bigger rooms as well as simply provide public spaces for social interaction.

"[The Rio] gave me a completely different perspective, attitude and appreciation of what it takes to successfully operate these kinds of enterprises," Marnell says. "It taught me that we needed to redefine how we were taking clients through the [design-build] process. The first thing people do when they say they are going to build something is to take out a piece of paper and a pencil and say, 'OK, design it.' But you start by defining the market that this building is going to talk to."

This idea gave birth to The Garage, Marnell Corrao's research and creative center.

"The buildings we have produced have been successful projects," Marnell says. Not because of "what shade of lipstick they had on or which dress they were wearing"—that was simply

external—but because the firm got better at predicting the next evolution of Strip design. Their laser-like focus trained on building office parks, retail centers and megaresorts that were modular so that they would have the ability to adapt as time goes on—form following function. "That's been the strength of this company."

He cites the Mirage and Rio as two classic examples. "Both buildings have been added to and modified numerous times with the least amount of impact to the operations of the facilities."

In the next 10 years, Marnell says building is going to be more about its architecture than ever before. The future of Marnell Corrao will lie with whether the firm gets the chance to show the real power of architecture—the good idea overriding the theme. And Las Vegas, he says, may be one of the first cities to move past the idea of iconic structures identifying a geological place altogether.

"We don't see a particular building as icon, rather we see this six-mile stretch of road in the middle of the desert as the icon. As soon as we fall in love with something around here," he says, laughing, "I get to tear it down." ■

## Perspective continued from page 112

from for—pick a number between 50 and 80—new high-rises? Or do we just assume that Vegas has chips on the table's zeros, too? Alas, Beckmann's work more than hints that humans can only roll so long against Mother Nature.

And what of the sun? Are we orientating all these new buildings correctly? Are we absorbing all that light for energy or deflecting it for shade? Are we offering public green spaces for every acre we pour concrete or asphalt onto? What's the trickle-down benefit from the booming part-time community to our full-time community?

It's hard to complain about a Monopoly game in which everybody's property has skyrocketed in value over the past two years, but are these homes built to last longer than 25 years ... because what happens then? Are our gates, walls and associations helping or hindering our quest to encourage "communities"—as defined by sociologists, not marketing whizzes? With even more blue collars coming are way, are we going to roll up our sleeves and get serious about affordable housing in the place that was once renowned for such a thing?

And since there's not enough oil to get us through the 21st century, shouldn't we be think-

ing of better, cheaper, cleaner and safer ways for our citizens to get to work—or visit their relatives in LA? Disneyland unveiled the monorail a half-century ago in a place called Tomorrowland.

If any city could show the world how living is to be done now that Tomorrow is here, it would be Vegas. And why not make an architectural statement while we're at it? After all, architecture is the field that really understands and has the know-how to tie all of these desirable aspects of existence together.

Perhaps Beckmann agrees. In another *Vanitas* painting—which, sadly, I last saw leaning against a wall in his Henderson studio rather than hanging on one in a local art museum—he put the Las Vegas Strip into the background of Poussin's "Landscape with St. John of Patmos" and called it "City Planner." Here there's no indication that Vegas should hedge her bets. In fact, Beckmann fantasized that the saint is a landscape architect who might be wondering, "Now what?"

Unlike the sky in "Plague," there is plenty of daylight left in this picture. There is still time. We've built this miracle in the desert, and there is still time to ask, "Now what?" What can we do now so that man and nature can harmoniously coexist in the future?

This is a much more pleasant question to deal with. ■



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# Our Lasting Impression

*Las Vegas' fabulous winning streak has no end in sight, but how is the bigger picture looking for the City of the 21st Century?*

**R**OBERT BECKMANN DID A SERIES OF SEVEN PAINTINGS A few years ago called *Vegas Vanitas*. You might say he brushed up some old classics by incorporating a Las Vegas that, at times, seems more archaeological than architectural. In his riff on J.M.W. Turner's "The 10th Plague of Egypt," you see peasants mourning the death of their first-born on a rocky hillside, with the once mighty Strip in the distance, its ruins ironically overrun by vegetation. Done in Old Master style, the result is breathtaking and apocalyptic. It's surrealism that fits somewhere between the *Planet of the Apes*' beginning and *The Time Machine*'s climax, where we discover that human power has been reduced, all of our industriousness a confusing heap of background rubble.

We're left with a haunting question: "What happened?"

I thought of this painting not when Bush won Nevada, but a week later while reading different front-page news, about the unveiling of MGM Mirage's Project CityCenter, a "Strip metropolis" (big hotel, boutique hotels, high-

rise condos, retail, dining, entertainment—and that's just Phase One) to be built on the 66 acres where the Boardwalk now stands. The concept is a bit staggering if you're new to this sort of deal, but anyone who's lived here awhile tends to be immune to high-stakes vertigo. Why sweat when we always seem to win?

Project CityCenter itself may be a sure bet, for all I know—10-figure wagering isn't my thing. What prompted the somber reflection was a quote from UNLV Professor Bill Thompson at the end of the article. He talked about how the psychology of the gaming industry is to grow until it busts. "That's the way we play the game," he said.

*Busts? Who busts? A-few-pharaohs-lose-their-jobs bust? Or the kind of cataclysmic bust that inspires oil paintings?*

In Las Vegas, ironically, that kind of artwork would be more likely to hang in a resort gallery or in a secret high-roller wing (as several Beckmanns do) than in a public museum. And this is not a wholly unrelated matter. There's a dichotomy in this city, which everybody knows. What is unusual is the scale. There is the Strip and the rest of the Valley, and both continue to boom exponentially. There are two ways we who straddle both worlds look at it:

One is awe. This is an incredible streak of great fortune—combined, of course, with some steely nerve and prescient

strategies—and we've all learned not to doubt its sustainability. We've become impervious to hard times by not only playing the game really well, but by owning the table. We keep up with what people want and deal accordingly. And so they keep coming. Amazing.

The second is anxiety. We've been touted as the City of the 21st Century. Indeed, there could be as much happening here now as in any city ever. Much of it will be the fantastic layers of urban fabric that we've all been waiting for. The only problem is that the time compression is dizzying, even by Vegas standards.

We've gone from gambling mecca with a back lot to gambling-shopping-dining-entertainment-resort mecca with an entire Valley of homes. We have communities within communities now, each established enough to have shopping districts and restaurant corridors, their own neighborhood hospitals, even hints of having their own attitudes. We're spread to the mountains and are bouncing back to the forgotten center, slowly infilling blighted areas. We're even bouncing up, in case you haven't heard.

In last year's best-seller *Devil in the White City*, we relearned that the 1893 World's Exposition in Chicago created "the city of realized dreams" for all to see. Time compression worldwide, I think, has done much to dampen our appreciation of World's Fairs. But why can't Las Vegas, starting with the Centennial year, be the start of the realized urban dream for all the world to see? We could even do it without the psychopathic subplot, and it would still sell, as does everything to do with Vegas.

Our current approach to urban planning finally seems to be producing more starts than fits. The Downtown Arts District is finally about to blast off; economic diversity is showing a spark (guess who's in charge of the nation's furniture industry?); loft living is through the roof; and the monorail plans are at least pointed in the right direction.

Still, that's not advanced enough in the land where anything has always been possible. For example, we should be strutting out the *new* New Urbanism by now. And Vegas should be its grand experiment, given our lab-like conditions that feature more and more people and less and less water.

The Las Vegas Springs Preserve and Red Rock Desert Learning Center projects demonstrate major progress toward long-term residential sustainability. But while they will show us how to live in what would be a godforsaken place if not for Hoover Dam, this speed-of-light city tends to be tortoise-slow when it comes to producing off-Strip ingenuity.

The drought we're in may be more than a mere ebb while we wait for nature's flow, scientists have warned. Unlike the economy, that's one down cycle Vegas can't tame. Where is all this new water going to come *continued on page 111*



In "City Planner," Beckmann pictured Poussin's saint as a landscape architect contemplating Las Vegas' future.

Story by  
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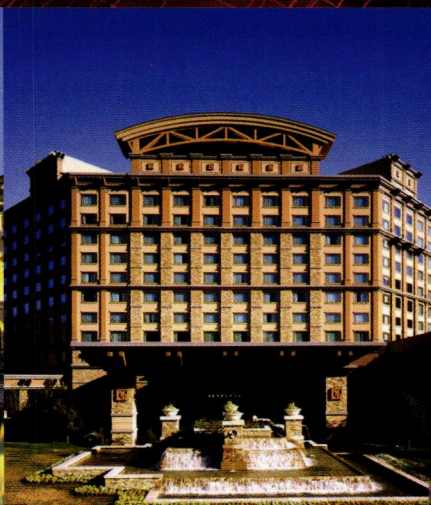
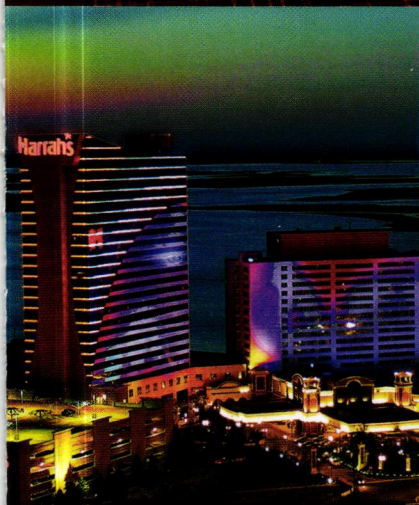




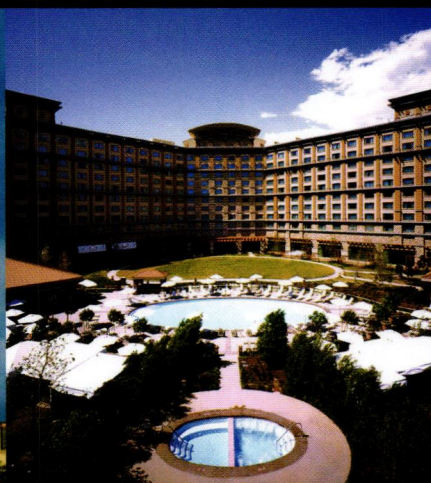
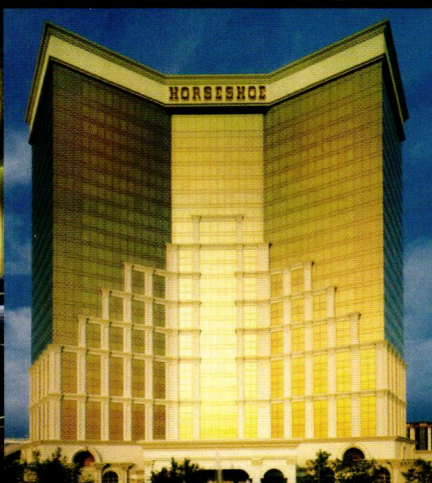
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